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THE BIG FOUR OF THE BOWERY.



"POLICE!" RETORTED ROBERT, WITH A SMILE; "WHAT BE THEY? AIN'T YOU AND I, MOLLY, THEIR MATCH?"

The Big Four of the Bowery;

OR,

DETECTIVE BOB, the RATTLER.

BY JO PIERCE,

AUTHOR OF "FIVE POINTS PHIL," "DENNIS DUFF," "TOM THISTLE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MAN TO BE ARRESTED.

A FLORID-FACED man came out of a building near the Bowery and, holding a paper in his hand, looked up and down the street. He saw a boy approaching and called to him:

"Here, young fellow, do you want a job?"

"Wal," replied the person addressed, "I am like the dog without his supper—waitin' fer the feed."

It was not the most precise of replies, but it seemed to satisfy the questioner.

"Here is a dollar. Will you take this letter over to the Bowery and deliver it for me?"

"I am your plum. Dollars always get me, an' this one looks pritty as a gal in a new bunnit."

"Go at once, and be faithful about it."

"I'm off!"

The messenger went, while the man returned to the building. His temporary employee cast a look backward.

"I know you, Mr. Con Martin," he murmured. "Your biz is sellin' pools on the races, an' you keep open the hole down which fools pour their cash. However, that don't interfere with my deliverin' this letter, an' my trotters will do the job. Addressed to 'Henry Corliss,' is it? I don't know him, but he is prob'ly some other shark like Con."

There was worldly wisdom in the air of this messenger, though he did not seem to care much about the matter, anyhow. It was his task to deliver the letter, and with the money in his pocket he need not worry more about the matter.

He looked to be about fifteen years old, himself, and was unusually large and muscular for the age. He was not especially handsome, but he had a broad, intelligent, good-humored face that was attractive to the eye.

In due time he reached the number indicated by the address on the envelope, and he turned into the doorway. A woman, not overclean, was engaged with some duty near the door.

"Where kin I find Henry Corliss?" asked the messenger.

"Second floor, back," was the terse reply.

"Thank ye, mum; very much obleeged, ye know."

He mounted the stairs and reached the door indicated. Voices sounded inside, but he knocked without any pause. A voice bade him enter and he obeyed.

Once inside he saw three persons and sized them up with his quick faculty for such things. There was a young man; a man of maturer years and a young lady. The messenger read them all, to a certain degree, at one glance.

"Young man is from the city," he thought, "while the other two are emigrants. But the gal is a good one!"

She was all of that; the most exacting would have pronounced her very pretty, and if she did not have the look of an American girl she surely was above the run of emigrants. No untidy and uncouth being she, but a lady well dressed and intelligent in all ways.

The older man, too, showed intelligence, though not so strongly, while the resem-

blance between the two suggested that they were father and daughter.

The messenger readily suspected that it was the rather fine-looking city man he was to see.

"Henry Corliss?" he asked.

"I am he," was the answer, not very graciously.

"Note fer you, with Robert Burns, *alias* Bob the Rattler, or Risky Robert, fer a bearer—which same is me."

"A note? Let me see it."

Corliss seized the envelope and looked at the superscription. His face shadowed, and then he quickly open the missive.

"You make much money at this business?"

It was the foreign-looking man who asked the question after a long survey of Robert, who smiled and returned:

"What biz?"

"You carry the letter."

"Oh! Wal, that was only one job. I ain't in et reg'lar, ye see. I corral a dollar out o' et, but may not strike a lead ag'in fer a month. Want ter go in, yerself?"

"I am looking for work. I look—ah! this very long while!" was the mournful explanation. "I came from Sweden with my daughter, Hecla—my name is Olaf Petersen—but I find nothing here to get me the bread and butter we must have."

"Wal, that is sad, b'jinks! Out o' work, eh? Sorry fer ye, an' I wish I could help ye, but I don't see the way clear, now."

"What work you do?"

"Neighbor, I'm a bit ashamed ter say I ain't a workin' bee, myself. I happen ter have a father who has some o' this world's goods, an' he encourages me ter be idle. Bad scheme, his, an' I don't intend ter stick to et long. I'm goin' inter his carpenter shop an' go ter work. Fact is, I have some bent o' originality, an' I am goin' ter try my luck as an inventor, b'jinks!"

Henry Corliss had been dwelling on his letter. He now put it away with an air which attracted Petersen's attention.

"Is it bad news?" he asked.

"It is not good," admitted Corliss, gloomily.

"It—it is not from Jack Webber?"

"No."

"Ah! why do we not hear from him?"

The Swede sighed as he spoke, and Robert saw a quick change pass over Corliss's face. He did not seem to find the subject pleasant.

"I would like to know about the bond," added Petersen.

"Let us hope all will be well."

"It will be—it must," remarked Hecla.

"Woman's faith!" sighed Olaf.

Corliss regarded Hecla in a peculiar way which Robert did not fail to see and understand.

"He's in love with her, an' they are all in a pile o' trouble," thought the messenger.

"Wonder what the racket is?"

Anxious to learn he delayed, even though his work was done. He heard footsteps in the hall and a knock came at the door.

"Come in!" called Olaf.

The door opened and two men entered. They were keen, alert-looking men, and Robert, whose eyes had been sharpened by the experience he had had with life as it was, at once thought he saw a strong resemblance to officers of the law in them. They looked around and then asked:

"Is Henry Corliss here?"

The person addressed was regarding them with doubt, even apprehension expressed in his face, and he remained silent, but Olaf answered:

"This is he," and pointed to the man named.

One of the strangers advanced and bowed stiffly.

"We are detectives," he added, "and we are here to arrest you."

"To arrest me?" gasped Corliss.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"You were lately an employee of Morris & Finnerty. They make charges against you, and you are wanted at Police Headquarters."

"What charges?" demanded Corliss, feebly.

"Probably you will learn when you see the superintendent of police. Our duty is only to take you there. Here is the warrant. Do you want to know more?"

Risky Robert was watching with the keenest interest. His errand to the house was bringing him far more of excitement than he had expected, and he was deeply concerned with all he saw. The blow had fallen as sharply as such things usually do. Not only was Corliss very pale and alarmed, but Petersen and his daughter were not less moved. Whatever their interest in the accused man it was plain it was not a light one, and so three pale faces met the gaze of the boy as he looked and tried to sum up the case.

Corliss made an effort and recovered the power of speech.

"Where is Mr. Morris? Where is Mr. Finnerty?" he asked.

"We don't know," replied the officer who had spoken before.

"This is a most unjust accusation."

"If you prove it at your trial, you will have no more trouble."

"But I want to see Morris, or Finnerty, now."

"Of course you will realize I can do nothing about that. I do not know where they are, and I could do nothing if I did. Our duty is simply to serve this warrant."

"I was never an employee of Morris & Finnerty!" cried Corliss, growing excited as he saw that the work was to be pressed on. "I was, and am, a member of the firm, and it is an outrage to arrest me thus."

"Do you not see," asked the detective, with commendable patience, "that we have nothing to do with what you speak of? I have next to no information on the subject, anyhow, for I have had no share in working it up. I only know I have been given this warrant to execute, and I must do my duty."

"And arrest me?"

"Yes."

Olaf Petersen had been looking and listening with the keenest of interest. As he saw the detective move forward, he interfered quickly.

"No, no!" he cried. "You must not do it!"

"Sir, you would not oppose officers doing their duty, would you?" demanded the detective, with some impatience.

"But I can't lose Mr. Corliss. It will ruin me."

"I know nothing about that."

"Henry," added Petersen, anxiously, "can't this be arranged?"

"I know of no way," gloomily replied the young man.

"But what am I to do if you leave me?"

Corliss looked at Hecla.

"Heaven knows; I don't!"

"Who will manage about the bond? How is it to be managed? I do not understand how to act in the case."

"I could kill myself!"

The words escaped Corliss's lips in a voice so low that only Risky Robert heard them, yet with the deepest of feeling, as if they came directly from his heart—from a heart torn with the keenest of sorrow. His head fell and he gazed only at the floor.

"Come, are you ready?" impatiently demanded the officer.

"As much now as any time."

Henry put out his hands, but Hecla, who had thus far been looking on with a pale, scared face, suddenly roused to action. With a cry unpleasant to hear, so full of

pain was its every inflection, she threw herself at the feet of the detective.

"No, no!" she exclaimed, "you must not, you shall not take him away. He shall not leave us!"

"Be still!" requested the officer, not unkindly.

He tried to break the hold she had fastened on his knees, but she resisted so strongly, it was not easy. She had lost all calmness, and seemed on the verge of a hysterical outbreak.

"You do not know what it means to us!" she added, pathetically. "Spare him! He must not, shall not go!"

CHAPTER II.

DRIVEN TO DESPERATION.

THE chief detective turned to his companion.

"Take her away," he requested.

The second man advanced and, with strong hands broke the hold of the girl's fingers. She sunk upon the floor.

Then the leader again moved toward Henry and grasped his arm.

"There is no escape for you," he said.

"Do not force us to endure this scene; do not force her to endure it."

The argument seemed to impress Corliss, and he took one step forward, but Hecla then leaped up.

"You shall not go!" she cried.

She clasped her arms around his neck and held fast, but the hold was broken. Patient the officers had been, but they were tired of the delay, and they wanted no more of it. Roughly one of the pair cast her aside. He had meant no more harm, but her foot caught and she fell heavily.

The sight stirred Corliss too much for his calmness. He turned upon the officer in a fury, and with a blow felled him to the floor. Then he leaped at the second man and he, too, went down. By this move, unexpected as it was to all, the opposition was for the time out of the race, and a wild impulse came to the accused man. The way to liberty was in a measure open, and he made a dash for the door.

One of the officers rose with unexpected agility and presented a revolver to the fleeing youth. Corliss grasped the weapon and tried to wrest it away. There was a report and the detective sunk down again.

"Great guns! It's a murder!" cried Risky Robert, impulsively.

Corliss stood staring at the victim with a dazed expression for a moment; then he turned again and fled from the room.

The wounded man rose partially, and, though unable to do more, spoke quickly to his companion:

"Pursue! Do not let him escape!"

The second officer rushed away in pursuit.

Those who remained behind were too moved by various circumstances to act to any purpose. Petersen was supporting his daughter's head and she was moaning in a half-unconscious way; while Robert gazed blandly at the wounded officer, not a little stirred to know he had been witness to such an event. The detective finally spoke:

"Boy, tear away my clothing and let me see if I am badly hurt."

"Correct, boss," answered Robert, with a return of his composure. "I ain't no surgeon, but I guess I'm enough fer your case. You speak up as pert as a gal with a new beau, an' et's a good sign."

"No frivolity; attend to business."

"Come now, don't git cranky, mister. I ain't yer nigger this year, an' I won't be set down on an' slain by yer lip. See? Wounded? Why, old man, a Bowery boy would take that hurt an' play base-ball with et, et's so small."

"It does seem slight."

"Cert!"

"But the fellow who did it shall suffer!"

"I believe they ginerally catch rabbits before they cook 'em, don't they, mister!"

"He will be caught easily."

"All right."

Bob did not seem to have much enthusiasm in the matter. In point of fact he had given his sympathies to Corliss, and was not in the least anxious to see the officers succeed—why he did not know.

"Go for a doctor," requested the wounded man, suddenly.

"I remember there is one in this building."

"Summon him."

Robert went for the man of medicine. On the way back he took a good look for signs of Corliss and his pursuer, but nothing could he see. Both appeared to have got out of sight mysteriously.

"B'jinks! I hope he will beat out the gavs. But wait, R. Burns; you ain't no law-breaker, an' you don't know what the rifle is. Be a bit slow until you are onto the game."

The doctor, being duly called, said the officer had a wound which would put him in the hospital for awhile, but one not necessarily fatal or dangerous. He did what he could, while Olaf kept by his daughter and looked on without any degree of good will expressed in his face.

Finally the second detective came in quickly.

"Where have you put him?" abruptly demanded the wounded man.

"I haven't put him."

"What do you mean?"

"He has escaped."

"Escaped!"

"Yes."

"Great heavens! you don't mean it?"

"He got out of my sight, and I have not been able to find him since. Of course it was done by his superior knowledge of the building."

"And has he really escaped?"

"Yes."

"What have you done?"

"Notified a patrolman and had a message sent to Headquarters."

"The best way, probably. Call an ambulance for me, or some service which will enable me to get to the hospital. Possibly a cab will do. Yes, I think it will."

A cab was duly summoned, and when it arrived the wounded man was taken away. Other officers put in an appearance, and the search for Corliss was resumed both in the adjacent houses and around the streets.

No heed was given to Petersen and his daughter, and Robert stayed with them. Hecla had been in a nearly fainting condition for a time, but as she gradually revived in all respects she took an earnest interest in matters concerning Corliss.

Olaf expressed the hope that Henry would not be found, and she agreed with him.

"It is infamous to charge him with wrongdoing!" she asserted.

"Right, child; right!" her father added.

"What's the rifle, anyhow?" asked Robert, suddenly.

"They did not say what he was accused of."

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"Corliss seemed to."

"Why do you think so?"

"He didn't press the p'int about what was up. Now, when a man is arrested an' he don't know what fer, he is pretty likely ter ask all sorts o' questions. Henry didn't, an' though he may be innocent, you kin jest about bet he was onto the racket."

"He has escaped them."

"Not fer long. They will have him."

Olaf turned to his daughter.

"If this is to be, what will become of our bond?" he asked, anxiously.

"Heaven knows!" murmured Hecla, disconsolately.

"What is this bond, anyhow?" inquired Robert.

"Ah! it is much, everything to us. We are poor people, and its loss means so much to us!"

"Tell me all about it."

"I am not sure it would be wise."

"Mebbe you would find et would be jest that. I ain't so green as I look, an' ef Henry could help ye, I may be able ter do the same. Drive ahead, an' let me on ter the thing."

Petersen meditated and decided to do as he was requested. He sat down and told his story in these words:

"My daughter and I have been poor, and life was so hard for us in Sweden that we decided to come here to America. Once we had been more prosperous, and we had put our little savings into a bond, or certificate of stock, as I hear it called, and this we kept intact through all our troubles."

"Finally I said to Hecla: 'We must do something or we shall reach the point of breaking in on the bond, to live. Now, besides that, we have just enough so that if we sell all out we can get to America. If we do this I can get work, and we will again be prosperous and not need to sell the bond.'"

"This was done and we came on. Alas! I did not get the work I desired; it seemed to me that New York was far more full of men than it could hold. There was nothing for me here—I searched long, carefully, anxiously, but no work was found and we all the while grew poorer."

"We had made some acquaintances, and among them Mr. Corliss. Another was named Jack Webber. He owns a horse, and races at the tracks around the city."

"When he heard about the bond he told me I was foolish to have a Swedish security when in this country, for I could exchange it for American securities which would bring me in far more money. I cannot tell just what he did say, for he talked so much I was bewildered, but I was told that the bond could be thus exchanged, and that what I could get for it in American bonds would almost support us, and make it unnecessary for me to sell it."

Robert shook his head.

"Fishy!" he muttered.

"At first Henry Corliss objected to this, but Webber talked with him and he agreed to it. I gave the bond to him, and he was to give it to Webber. He did so, but Webber has not made his report, and we have not seen him since. Henry has been looking for him, but has not found him. We are waiting, waiting, always waiting, and no word comes from Webber. I do not see how it is. I do not see where the bond is."

"You never will see et!" muttered Robert.

CHAPTER III.

THE RATTLER AT WORK.

DETECTIVE BOB had formed his opinion of the state of affairs, and he made up his mind that the emigrant's bond was gone forever unless some happy chance resulted in its recovery.

Both Petersen and Robert had unconsciously looked down as a pause followed the end of the explanation, and the latter happened to see the letter which he had brought to Corliss, and which had been dropped by the young man when the officers came.

Quickly the boy picked it up.

"Ah! the letter!" exclaimed Olaf. "It must be kept for Henry when he comes again."

He held out his hand, but Robert coolly proceeded to read what was there. This was the letter:

"DEAR CORLISS:—I am unable to tell you where Jack is now, but of this I am sure:

You would make a big mistake to carry out the idea you have mentioned. Jack is all right, and you need not go to worrying over him. Don't you know how solid he is? Be easy, for it will all come out right. Now, don't ruin all by rashness. Get Jack mad and where will you be? Trust him, for he is white.

C. M."

"Aha!" muttered Robert.

"What is it?" asked Olaf.

"Do you know Con Martin?"

"No."

"Never heard of him?"

"No."

"You say that Jack Webber owns a hoss that goes the races?"

"Yes."

"Jes' so, by mighty! Ef I ain't 'way off I kin see the inwardness o' all this. Jack and Con are in a game ter do ye up; an' they hev someway made Henry their dupe, or something o' the sort. Hoss-owner an' hoss trickster, et's all one."

"I don't understand."

"Nor I, fully, but I will ef you give me word. Mebbe I kin get that bond o' yours back. Do you give me leave?"

"Do I? Yes; a thousand times, yes!"

"Tell me all you kin about Henry an' Jack."

Olaf obeyed. What he had to say was of interest only as it concerned the life and movements of the two, but it was just what Robert most desired, and he treasured it all up.

"That's the stuff!" he commented.

"Can you get the bond?"

"I kin try, an' nobody could do more than that. Mebbe I kin do a pile better than Henry. Some folks call me Robert, the Rattler, because I get onter things so, an' you may depend on me in this case. My friend, how much goods hev you here?"

"Nothing but our trunks."

"Pack them an' move!"

"Move?"

"So I said."

"We have nowhere to go."

"You bet you have! My stern patient, George Alonzo Burns, is a white man and a scholar, ef he is a bit shaky on his spellin' book, an' ef his son says you are ter be taken in you won't get no refusal. Jest pack up an' hump yerself!"

"But why should we?"

"Because, my Christian friend, at any minute you're liable ter see a copper waltz in an' gobble you ez witness ter the shootin' that has been done here. The only wonder is that it was not done right off—the gobblin' of the whole lot on us, I mean."

"What would they do to us?" anxiously asked Olaf.

"Take ye to the House o' Detention."

"What is that?"

A clear explanation was on Robert's lips, but it suddenly struck him that the House of Detention might impress Olaf as just the place he wished to go to, in his poverty, and as this was not what Robert wanted, he made an answer not wholly free from guile:

"Prison, o' course."

"Oh! oh! that will never do."

"It would do too well ef they kep' ye there three or four years."

"Ah! we must go at once."

Wily Robert had accomplished his object, and he saw his plan go into effect with commendable quickness. The trunks were hurriedly packed; an expressman was called, and then the party left the house.

Their arrival at the residence of the senior Burns struck that honest, slow-going man with force.

"What in the world have you done, Rob?" he demanded.

"Adopted Sweden."

"How is that?"

"Wal, these folks are in hard luck, an' as your carpenter-shop is payin' right wal these

days—I heard you tell Sam Miggs so—you kin afford ter be generous. These are my adoptions, so you want ter receive them wal."

Mr. Burns laughed. He was a proud and indulgent father, and what Robert did was about right in his eyes at all times.

"Have it your own way," he answered.

"Of course you have looked into this thing, so I have nothing to say."

A remarkable parent was Mr. Burns, but he thought he had a remarkable son and could afford to give him his own way in such things.

Having thus housed his charges, Robert set out to do more. If there was danger of the Swedes being seized as witnesses to the shooting in the Bowery place, there was the same danger for himself, but he was reckless on that point. He went back to the house to learn all he could. This was not much, and he had to leave without light which would guide him as he wished.

He was wandering away, using a side street, when he chanced to see Mr. Con Martin enter a house there. He became on the alert at once. Among the things he wanted to know was where all the actors in this drama lived, and he hoped one question was solved.

He was close to the door when Con walked in, and a few steps more took him opposite the entrance. The door had not been closed, and he saw Con and a young girl in the hall.

The pool-seller was giving his attention to her and trying to be agreeable, but he did not seem to succeed to any great degree. She evidently was angry.

"Now don't be in a hurry, my dear," Robert heard him say. "You should not be so coy with those who admire you."

"I haven't a word to say to you, Con Martin," she replied.

"But I have something to say to you, my dear."

"I'm not your dear!" she flashed.

"Oh! come, now, don't get angry. You haven't a better friend than I am. Molly, do you realize you are getting to be a woman? You are, and you ought to have admirers—"

"You can't be one of them!"

"But I am."

"Con Martin, I want to go out of that door, and if you don't get out o' my way, I will call for help."

"Tell you what, Molly, if you'll give me a kiss, you may go."

So saying, the fellow flung his arms around her and attempted to take what he wanted, regardless of her wishes. Bob saw she was only about fourteen years old, and that she was being persecuted by the unmanly pool-seller, and he wanted to go to her aid, much as he also desired to avoid getting Martin down on him. Doubtless the watchful boy would have given a helping hand at once, but the result proved that Molly was able to care for herself.

Neatly she squirmed out of his hold, and then her hand came down on his cheek with a sound which told that it must have made its mark even on such a brazen surface.

A resounding slap it was, and then Molly dodged past her persecutor, passed out of the door, and slammed it to behind her.

Mr. Con Martin did not follow.

"Bully fer you, b'gosh!"

Molly looked as the words fell on her ears and saw Robert, the Rattler, gazing in profound admiration.

"What did you say?" she asked.

"I observiated, bully fer you."

Robert's broad face was the picture of good-humor and admiration, and Molly did not feel offended.

"That man is a wretch!" she declared.

"Now you hit et pritty near the bull's-eye, but there is one thing ter console ye."

"What?"

"You hit him a swipe in the jaw that

must have made his teeth shake hands with each other."

"He deserved it."

"So he did. Does he live in there?"

"Yes. He has a room from Mrs. Nevins."

"You live in there, too?"

"Yes."

"Has he got cronies in there, likewise?"

"None o' them room there, but he has men come to see him. He is a pool-seller, an' lots o' horsemen come around. He's especially thick with a man named Jack Webber, an' they think they run about all o' New York, but they are a hard crowd, an' I just hate them—so there, now!"

"Bully fer you!" cried Robert, admiringly. "You're a reg'lar prize package."

CHAPTER IV.

A HOUSE OF SUSPICION.

EVIDENTLY Molly did not find Robert, the Rattler, so unpleasant as Con Martin, for she evinced no desire to avoid talking with him. She surveyed his face closely and seemed to be sizing him up generally.

Robert, on his part, thought himself in clover. He had learned positively that Martin and Webber were intimates, and he hoped he was on his way to more knowledge through the help of Molly.

"What do ye know about Webber?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"Easy told! Don't you know where he lives?"

"No."

"Can you find out?"

"Don't know of any way."

"Couldn't you get it out o' Con?"

"Mebbe I could, but I ain't in that business. I don't make any talk with Mr. Con Martin. Is Webber a friend o' yours?"

The amiability of Molly's nature had suddenly received a fall, and she looked at Robert so sternly that he hastened to exclaim:

"Say, don't drop on me in that sort o' style! I never see Webber in my life, an' as fer Con, though I ain't acquainted with him, I know him to be the worst kind of a shark. Don't misuse me, Miss Molly, fer I don't deserve a rakin'."

"I hope you'll excuse me, for I don't mean any harm. All I thought was that if you were in with that crowd you couldn't be nice."

"Molly, you are a level-headed miss. I couldn't be so, b'mighty!"

The acquaintance between Robert and Molly was fully under way, and from the manner in which they looked at each other it was clear it was not an unpleasant one on either side. Molly was not in the habit of stopping to talk with those whom she did not know, but there was something about the jolly-faced Robert which made her reluctant to leave him so abruptly that he would feel slighted—so she expressed it to herself.

Perhaps Robert lingered longer than was necessary, but he finally felt that he must go.

"Wal," he said, "I'll toddle along, but ef you don't object I'll come around some time ter talk about Con Martin. I think he's a bad egg, an' I'd like you ter keep posted on him."

"I will."

"Correct! Now, I'll chase myself away."

He went, still meditating on what he had heard.

"Trouble is plenty fer them. Petersen is ter be euchered out o' his bond ef them skunks kin do et, an', with Henry a fugitive, where is there hope fer them? There is none, unless Risky Robert comes inter the game, an' that is jest what he means ter do. Yes, sirree, you must buckle on yer har-

ness an' do yer prettiest, old man. But where shall you begin?"

The next half-hour was spent in wandering around and meditating on this very serious question. Then Robert chanced to pause on the corner of a street where two rough-looking men stood in conversation. He did not know that he had ever seen them before, and felt no earthly interest in them, at the beginning, but it was one of those accidental encounters which sometimes mean so much.

"Say, Pete," suddenly asked one of the pair, "how much longer do we stay in this thing?"

"Why," replied the other, with an air of surprise, "as long as et pans out anything."

"S'pose et pans out an arrest?"

"What! be you scared?"

"Not much I ain't, but et's right here.

All snaps play out sooner or later. This one will, an' when the crash comes there is likely ter be a scoop o' the boys. Now, we hev done wal an' got some money to the good. Why not pull out while the thing is possible?"

"Ef I do, may my luck go back on me!"

"I mean, resign honorable."

"Do et, ef you wish; I won't."

"You may be sorry."

"Cap Bunker is a shrewd feller, an' I reckon he won't see the game bu'st right away. I'll trust ter him an' stay in, an' my advice is that you do the same, Alf."

"You're experienced, an' ef you say so I'll do it."

"I do say et. An' now let's go ter the rendezvous. Con Martin will be on watch, as usual, an' ef we are late Cap Bunker will hear of et, an' then he will kick as usual."

"We'll toddle along."

Pete and Alf went, leaving Robert looking after them with a serious expression.

"Ag'in I hear of Mister Con Martin. These fellers are in some work where they're afraid o' bein' arrested, an' Con is in the gang. Wonder ef I can't get closer ter Con's comin's an' goin's by lookin' inter this?"

The self-inquiry was enough to send Robert along in the rear of the two men, and he followed them to a dingy-looking house a few blocks away. There they entered. Robert stood on the sidewalk in irresolution for several minutes, but the desire to go deeper into the matter caused him to keep his mind upon it.

"What are ye pipin'?"

The question sounded at Bob's side so abruptly that he turned with a decided start. He saw a colored youth of about his own age, though of much lighter weight.

"What's that?" inquired Robert.

"I say, what be you pipin'?"

"How do ye know I am pipin' anything?"

"Seen ye sizin' that place up?"

"Wal, what be you doin'?"

"I'm sizin' it up, too!"

"Oh! be you? Why?"

"I want to know somethin', an' mebbe you can tell me," answered the negro. "Does Jack Webber hang out in there reg'lar?"

"Who?"

"Jack Webber."

"Why do ye think he does?"

"I seen him go in."

"You see Jack Webber go in there?"

"I did."

"Say, my friend, who be you, anyhow?"

"Come over to Guttenburg any day an' you will see," proudly replied the colored boy. "I'm Cal Demorest, the jockey."

"So you ride hosses fer a livin'? Wal, I don't know so very much about the biz, except in a general way, but I should say et was better ter ride than to bet. Ef you ride you kin feel the hoss under ye, but b'jinks! ef you bet you don't ginerally feel yermoney afterward. So you know Jack Webber. What of him?"

"He has made me an offer ter ride fer him, but I ain't sure o' his standin'. I hev

been doggin' him. He went in there, an' now what I want ter know is, what sort of a place is it?"

To himself Robert remarked:

"Alf spoke of a business where there was danger of arrest. Con Martin an' Jack Webber are in et. Ain't this worth lookin' inter?"

Aloud he asked:

"Cal, s'pose you an' me go inter this?"

"Done!" exclaimed the jockey.

"Be you willin' ter take some risk?"

"Sure!"

"Enough ter break in?"

"Yes."

"Then in we go ef it kin be done."

"Can't we pass through that alley ter the back-yard?"

"Jest what I was lookin' at. Come on; let's try et."

Through the alley they passed, and further survey awakened the suspicion that the building was not regularly occupied. It had the look of a place which was being allowed to go to decay without a regret from any one.

"Kind of a herdin' place fer the gang," suggested Robert. "Le's go up on the balcony and see what we kin discover."

Cal hesitated. Robert's nickname of "Risky" well described the kind of a person he was, but Cal was more timid.

He yielded, however, when his attention was called to the fact that the darkness of the evening made their movements fairly safe from the outside, while it was their purpose to avoid notice from the inside, which they hoped to do.

Ascending the stairs they peered through the window. They had view of the back parlor, but, though it was lighted, no one was to be seen, nor could they hear anything.

"We must go in," remarked Robert.

"Why, it'll be burglary."

"Not when we're in detective work."

"But ef they find us—"

"Then it'll be a case of our chasing ourselves out."

The Rattler's debonair manner affected Cal, and, with a sudden recklessness he agreed to the plan.

They entered the house.

There was nobody who believed in law and good conduct any more than Robert, but he was in this case for a good purpose, and, being in, he was not disposed to let grass grow under his feet. Knowing the suspected men were there somewhere he continued the search with zeal.

Out into the hall, and then up the stairs he pursued his way.

CHAPTER V.

AN UNLUCKY EVENT.

"VOICES!"

Detective Bob whispered the word, touching Cal Demorest significantly, and the jockey replied:

"They're in that room."

"They be, sure, an' the way is open fer us ter listen. We will go to the door an' spike our ears back so as to ketch all."

"Can we hear through the door?"

"I guess so. We can try, anyhow."

"Suppose they ketch us at it?"

"We've got to take that chance. The only thing that gits me is, ef they have such private biz how does et happen they leave the way open fer intruders to make so free? You would think— Scoot!"

Robert seized Cal's arm and dragged him back.

"What?" asked the jockey.

"Man comin' up the stairs. Another crow comin' to the rendezvous, I reckon."

With his usual quick wit Robert had hurried Cal into the room at the rear of that occupied by the men. He expected to be there only a moment, for he thought the per-

son coming up the stairs would enter the room of conference, too, but he was greatly disappointed.

The new-comer, a burly, evil-looking fellow, stopped in the hall, and posed in a way which the Rattler understood very well.

"I'll be jiggered ef he ain't goin' to stand there as a guard!"

Deep was the disgust of the speaker, while Cal looked alarmed.

"We shall be ketched!" he lamented.

"Now, you hol' on, my colored frien'. A chap that has piloted hosses ter victory ought ter have nerve enough not to swoon when there is no need of et, b'jinks! Cal, you must brace!"

"I will," resolutely answered the jockey.

"Lay down your rules, an' I won't be a weak sister any more."

"That's the figger. Wal, Cal, et's plain we can't get out o' here while that bilious-lookin' chap stands guard, so we must do the next best thing. I'm goin' to see ef I can hear the talk in the next room. You will see that between that and this is a middle room o' some sort. Jest what kind of a trap et is we can't tell until we look, fer this house is built on a plan of its own. We'll look, though."

Robert opened the door and saw a small room which was full of old rubbish, chiefly in the way of boards and boxes. They were piled at each side, barely leaving room for passage.

Again the Rattler used his eyes. He saw that there was a hole in the wall which would give view of the next room if he could get up high enough to utilize it, and this seemed easy, for the boxes were piled up even above it.

By means of pantomime he gave Cal the clue, and then set out to ascend. The only difficulty about this was that there was danger of the boxes giving way and making a racket, but he succeeded in going up all right.

Then he had the desired view of the front room. Lying flat he gazed and saw the whole gang, and the sight was of interest.

Pete and Alf were there, and so was Con Martin.

Con sat by the side of a stout, rather flashy-looking man who had the marks of a typical sport written by Nature all over him, and the latter was busy with a piece of paper and a pencil. While he figured, or seemed to, the others kept silent and waited.

Jockey Cal had grown curious, and he climbed up beside Robert. He started and then put his lips close to Robert's ear.

"Jack Webber!" he whispered.

"Which one?" asked Robert.

"The fellow with the pencil. Oh! what are they up to?"

"Pin yer ears back an' bark."

With this terse advice Robert proceeded to give all his own attention to the scene before him. It might be only a meeting of horse-men, since Jack was in that business, but he did not believe it.

Finally Webber ceased work with the pencil and looked toward his companions.

"A good dividend, this time," he remarked.

"How much?" asked Pete, quickly.

"Suppose I said the same as the last time?"

"Gee! It would be huge."

"It is more. We shall each of us corral about twenty-five cases more than the last dividend."

Exclamations of delight fell from the lips of the men, and Pete and Alf shock hands buoyantly.

"This is very satisfactory," added Jack, presently, "and all the more so as it proves that our business is increasing. We are having steady gains, and we shall grow rich fast."

"What is the next push?" asked one of the party.

"I have, as usual, written down directions for each of you, but further than this nothing positive is yet decided upon. There will, however, be no great lull before we get a move on and make another raise. Our course is upward and onward."

"Cap, you are a hustler. There may be men who rank high in diplomacy and statesmanship, but what one of them is longer-headed than Cap Bunker?"

"That's right!" cried the men in unison.

"Gentlemen, you do me proud," declared Jack. "I thank you for your good will, and I shall try to respond to it in the most practical way of all—by filling your pockets. Now, let's have our beer and drop business for a time. Get out the lager, Mike."

One of the gang went to a kind of refrigerator at one side and several bottles were duly brought to light and set out for the men. They did not neglect the chance to test their contents.

Much to Bob's disgust, however, they talked on trivial subjects.

"Say," the Rattler whispered to Cal, "be you onto their biz?"

"No."

"What's their scheme fer gettin' cash?"

"They ain't said."

"Right you be, they ain't."

"I don't believe it's anything honest."

"My frien', et wouldn't surprise me an atom ef they was regular crooks. They are a hard-lookin' gang, an' et would be about their size. Jack is the king-pin, an' I don't go much on his looks, ef he has a kinder swell appearance. You an' me swing around in an atmosphere of moral virtue, but we ain't no innocents. We kin see them fellers are law-breakers o' some sort. The question is, what? an' that's what we are goin' ter find out."

"I'm with ye," agreed Cal, with enthusiasm.

"Don't talk no more, now."

All they had said had been in a very low tone, but Robert was wise enough to see that they were running risks with every word. So he called the halt and nothing more was said.

The Rattler had a general plan in his mind which was very prudent, and which was that they should keep their place until they were able to get out of the house unseen and unheard, but plans do not always work as arranged.

The men continued their conversation.

"Jack," said one of them, "is it safe to be on your racer for the second event tomorrow?"

"Hanged if I know," replied Jack, indifferently.

"Is he in good condition?"

"So they say."

"What do you say?"

"Why, man, I don't know a race-horse from a car-horse. I'm no judge of such things. The horse looks trim to my eye, but that's all I can say."

"You are a queer racing man."

"Of course you know my ownership is all a blind. Curiously enough, I am not, at heart, interested in racing, and I only own the brute so that it need not be said that I am without visible means of support. The trick has worked well, and the police know me as a sporting man, and never think of looking into my affairs."

"You are long-headed."

"I trust I know enough to cover up my tracks."

Jack reached over for a fresh cigar, but as he did so there was a rattling sound in the next room and something remarkable followed.

Through the hole in the wall shot a human being who only partially broke his fall, and the conversation stopped short as the men saw a boy sprawling on the floor. Big grew their eyes, but attention was directed elsewhere as a second boy came flying after the

first—it seemed as if there was a rain of boys.

The explanation was simple. The boxes which had held the young adventurers up had given way and simply shot them through the hole in the wall into the room.

Detective Rob had come first, and he was quick to see that something must be done promptly or they would be ruined. He was not injured, and he leaped to his feet.

The room was lighted by means of a kerosene lamp, and this was on the table near him.

He made one dive and reached the place; he blew with vigor, and the room became wholly dark. Out from the view of the dumfounded men went the mysterious intruders, and they were perfectly bewildered.

"What is it?" cried Con.

"Police!" suggested Pete.

"Guard the door!" called out Jack. "Let no one escape!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE RATTLER IS PRODDED.

DETECTIVE BOB was doing a good deal of thinking, and there was ample need of it. He had much to work for—not only did he wish to escape, but he wanted to keep his identity a secret, so that he could labor more successfully in the future.

He had seen Cal struggling to his feet before the light went out, and he now made a quick movement and gained his side.

"Get a move on!" whispered the Rattler. "Point fer the door an' go like a whirlwind. Go!"

The jockey could not fail to understand the plan, and they started together. There was an audible movement on the part of the foe to shut them off, but they comprehended the value of a headlong rush, and were not wholly without hope.

Robert took the lead. He plunged forward like a battering-ram.

Just when he knew he must be near the door, he saw a dark form before him, and he lowered his head, placed his shoulder forward, and went into the form like a thunderbolt.

The collision was telling, but Robert had the advantage of his own impetus, and the man was sent sprawling on the floor. He had received a fall which jarred both himself and the house, but he retained the power of speech and used it to the fullest extent.

"Yah! yah!" he yelled, wildly. "I'm murdered! They have broke my neck! I am a dead man! Yah! yah!"

"What is it?" cried Jack.

"The fiends seem to have broken loose!" added Con.

"Yah! yah!"

The fallen man continued his yells, which were simply those of pain and fright, but he was struggling to get up, and as his friends hurried forward, two of them fell over him before they realized the danger.

In the mean time the boys had been improving their chances to the best of their ability. They had reached the hall all right, but there they encountered the guard. He was fully on the alert, and, when they tried to pass, they found him an obstacle of no mean kind.

Their rush was checked, and both were flung back against the wall like mere children.

The reversal bewildered them, and they had an idea that he presented a barrier that could not be overturned.

"Try it this way!" suggested Robert, pulling at Cal's sleeve, and they made a new rush, this time for the rear room, though why they went there, the Rattler could not have told.

But now the other men were in the hall.

"Cut them off!" ordered Jack.

Robert found men in the way he had marked out.

"Up-stairs!" gasped Cal.

Even then it occurred to Robert that the jockey's plan was not wise, but he was not himself fully clear-headed. The pressing need of getting away dwarfed all else, and he yielded. The stairs were near them, and they sped up with long steps.

"They ain't got us yet!" cried Cal, defiantly.

"But where are we to go?"

"Up on the roof."

"What'll we do when we get there?"

"Go to the next roof."

"Mebbe you want to play tag up there with men who would not scruple to cut our throats, but et don't suit me. Not any!"

"What better can we do?"

"Sure enough."

"They're after us!"

"Up we go, then."

The Rattler did not speak with his usual vim and cheerfulness, but if he had serious doubts as to the result, it was through the teachings of his judgment and not the result of his fears. How they were to baffle the foe he did not see, though.

The top floor was duly reached and they looked for the desired way of going further, but the darkness was so great they could see nothing whatever.

"D'ye see the ladder?" asked Robert.

"No, an' they are humpin' up the stairs after us."

"Let 'em hump. Ef et comes ter that we will jest turn pugilists an' make the smartest kind of a fight. Say, ain't there no ladder, an' no skylight hyer?"

"I don't see any."

"Me, too! B'jinks! I guess we hev gone ker-smack into a trap, an' them blamed skunks are right here, too."

"Lay low, or they will hear ye."

"Cal, wrap yer ear around this think: We must watch our chance an' take another skip. Your notion o' goin' by the air line will do fer thinkin' on, but et ain't worth a continental fer practice. Our way is down the stairs ag'in, an' we must look a little out an' be ready fer the heat when the flag drops. See?"

"Yes."

There was time to say no more. The enemy were already on their floor, and though the darkness shut out discovery, at once, the searchers were all in earnest.

"Strike a glim," suggested one.

"There ain't any gas up here."

"Then get a lamp."

"Don't waste the time," added the authoritative voice of Jack Webber. "We can capture them in a short time. Their fighting days are over."

The Rattler made a grimace. He had his opinion of the statement. There might be another surprise party.

"Pete, you know this place the best. Push ahead and root them out. Of course they are in some recess, and it will be quick work to secure them. Go on!"

"I'll soon have the little snipes out."

With this confident assertion Pete moved to his work. He had secured a stick like a cane, and with this he felt his way.

"Lots o' crannies about here where they might put their beeks an' not be seen," he observed, "but I do know 'em all. They ain't in there!"

He had prodded with the stick and satisfied himself as to one recess. He now moved to another, and it was something of great interest to Robert, for right there he was crouched behind a box.

"Hurry up!" urged Jack's voice. "Get the young whelps out."

"I'm after them," replied Pete, with a punch of the stick.

"Go right in there, if there is a recess."

"I'm no shadder, an' I can't go inter a hole made fer a rat, but I kin tell ef the kids are there."

He prodded with the stick, and it grazed Robert's neck.

"Do you feel them?"

"Not yet, but I will."

Again a prod, and the Rattler had quite as narrow an escape.

"I'll spear them like a Kimanch Injun would," boasted Pete.

"Do it, and talk less."

"Ha! I reckon I touched him!"

The cane had been jabbed viciously into Robert's ribs.

"I'll drive him right out," added Peter.

Again the prod, and the Rattler shrunk away as he got a poke in the stomach. It was getting to be exciting, and discovery seemed certain. He knew not how to meet this emergency. He was aware that Cal was near him, and it might be the best of times to make a dash for safety, but how was he to get word to his ally?

One of the other men had found a stick, and he was imitating Pete. He was near the box which concealed Cal, and he soon gave that king of the turf a punch which brought a roar of pain.

"Ouch! Get out, you demon!" cried Cal.

The time of secrecy was past, and Robert acted accordingly. He sprung from behind the cover and his voice rung out clearly:

"Scoot, pard!"

With this direction Robert leaped out of his hiding-place, and like a mad bull on a rampage he dove toward the stairs. He did not expect to reach that point without a collision, but experience had shown him that, though he had not the physical strength of a man, the advantage in a rush was usually with the person, big or little, who made the most of the first moments.

Two or three steps he went; then his shoulder encountered some hard substance. There was a tremendous shock, but, while the Rattler came out of it successfully, one of the men was bowled over like a ten-pin.

The fugitive reached the head of the stairs.

"I'm with ye!" exclaimed a voice by his side, and he felt renewed relief as he recognized Cal's voice.

"Hustle!"

"I will."

Down the stairs fled the youthful pair, while Jack's voice sounded angrily from above.

"After them! If they escape we are ruined!"

"Shoot the varmints!"

The last speaker probably took his own advice, and a revolver was twice discharged. The bullets went wide and the boys pursued their way with haste. Robert had little faith that they would succeed in getting clear, but the result proved that the enemy had failed to guard the line of retreat.

Tearing open the outer door the fugitives dashed out on the street.

"Safe!" cried Robert, jubilantly.

CHAPTER VII.

JACK GETS MARKED.

THE exultation was not premature. Bob and Cal were on the street, and they felt able to defy any and all pursuit, especially as there was no danger that Jack Webber and his heelers would call in the police.

The boys ran down the block for some distance. When they paused they had a glimpse of a man entering the house they had left so abruptly.

Bob laughed lightly.

"They give et up," he remarked.

"Distanced!" added Cal, tersely.

"Sure! Their hoss was the favorite at the post, but et wa'n't rode so wal as et might 'e' been. Cal, what hev we run up ag'in?"

"Give et up."

"Jack an' his gushers are crooks—you kin bet yer buttons on that—but further I don't know. We didn't get onter their line."

"I guess I won't engage ter ride Jack's hoss."

Robert looked his companion over more critically. Cal was a likely-looking, trim young colored person, and the desire seized the Rattler to keep up his acquaintance.

"Say, pard, do ye want to go inter this biz with me in the detective line?" he asked.

Cal's eyes brightened.

"What kin we do?"

"Get the bulge on these fellers."

"Wal, by gosh! ef you'll show me the way I am with ye."

"Come with me an' I'll tell ye a good deal you don't know."

The Rattler thought he knew when to trust others, and it impressed him that Cal-houn Demorest was one of those worthy of such trust. He led the jockey to a safe place and then gave him the story of what had recently come under his notice in the affairs of the Petersens, Henry Corliss and Jack Webber.

"At the very least," he said, it "is the intention of the gang to beat the Swede out of his bond, an' I mean ter stop et, though how I don't just know."

"Ef I kin help, I will."

"Good! We'll form a combine, an' what we don't learn won't be worth knowin'."

After a little more talk the two left the house and walked on down the street. Their course was homeward, and as they went they discussed the future and tried to see where they could strike next in their campaign.

Pursuing their way thus they turned a corner and came upon a new and interesting scene.

"Hullo! there's a commotion!" exclaimed Robert.

"Feller an' girl havin' a scrap."

"Yes, an' I'll be darned ef she don't look like Hecla Petersen!"

"Say, the man is Jack Webber!"

"Jee-whiz! Pard, we want a hand in that. Hustle, an' see what the rifle is, anyhow."

What Cal had indefinitely referred to as a "scrap" was merely a war of words, but it was one warm in its way, and with the identity of the pair known it was clear that they could not be having a talk other than interesting to the boys. They hastened forward and soon reached the vicinity. Both Jack and Hecla were too much occupied to notice them at first.

The light of the street-lamp fell upon the two and made their faces plainly readable. Jack seemed worried, while Hecla was agitated and anxious, but firmer than was to be expected.

"Miss Petersen," Webber was saying, "I assure you I have not now, and never had the bond in my possession."

"I do not believe you!" she declared.

"Then you do me wrong."

"Henry Corliss said he gave it to you."

"Do you know his reputation?"

"What about yours?"

"It is spotless."

"Do you think me so dull that you can convince me of this?"

"I want justice," asserted Jack, with an injured air.

"Where do you think it would take you?"

"Anyhow," sullenly declared the sport,

"I have not the bond."

"It iz false!"

"My dear young lady, if you will give me time I will convince you that you do me injustice. You put too much faith in Corliss, who, I am compelled to believe, is not what he should be. He took your bond, not I, and—"

"He gave it to you."

"He did not! Now, see here," continued Jack, with an ugly air, "I don't want to be

worried any more about this matter. If your friends have proved black sheep it is none of my business, and you will have to look to them."

"Henry Corliss has done no harm!" cried Hecla.

"I hear he is a fugitive," sneered Jack.

"Unjustly, believe me."

"Well, go to him about your bond. He never gave it to me."

"Sir, I will have you arrested if you do not do us justice!" declared the girl, with spirit.

"You had better not."

"Why?"

"I am a man of influence in this city, and I would surely ruin you if you tried any blackmailing game on me—"

"Do you not know that the bond is all we have in this world—"

"I don't care a rap what you have, or have not; this business does not concern me. Get out of my way, and let me go in peace!"

As the sport spoke he tried to pass, but Hecla caught at his arm and held fast.

"I will have you arrested!" she exclaimed.

Webber muttered a savage word and shook her in an effort to release himself.

"Hadn't we better chip in?" asked Cal Demorest, nervously.

"Yes, go in!" replied Robert, promptly.

They hastened forward, but Jack, having decided on his course, was not to be deterred by Hecla's feeble hold. He gave her a push so rough that her hold was broken, and so violently that she fell to the sidewalk. Then Jack hastened on, and the would-be rescuers were not near enough to do anything to stop him. Some one else was, however.

Out from a deep doorway shot a slight form, and the sport was again seized.

"Stop, villain!" came in a voice which would have done credit to a Bowery theater.

"Molly!" exclaimed Robert, once more surprised.

Molly it was, and she proved to be the worst opponent Webber had encountered in some time. She clung to him with her small hands, showing surprising power, and all the while she kept up a war of words.

"Oh! you dastard, you thief, you thug!" she panted. "Wouldn't I jest like ter do ye up? Oh! ef I was a man I wouldn't leave enough o' you fer a specimen. You're a snake, you be!"

Jack began to get rattled. He saw Robert and Cal hastening toward him, and though he had not discovered that they were any one he had seen before he began to have a wholesome fear of the consequences of evil-doing.

He redoubled his efforts to get free, and the result was that Molly sunk her fingernails into his flesh until he was ready to yell with pain. His face was being mutilated, and he was about crazy for the time being.

With a great effort he shook her off. At that moment a cab was passing, and he rushed toward the staring driver.

"Ten dollars to get me away from here quickly!" he cried.

The driver was one to be reached by such an appeal and he flung open the door of his vehicle.

"Get in!" he ordered.

Promptly Jack obeyed, and he was whirled away just as the two boys rushed up in vain pursuit. The chance was still open for them to go on and summon a policeman, and this mode of procedure was advised by Cal, but Robert had other views.

"No," he explained, "we are workin' this on the dead quiet, and I don't see how even Hecla is to gain anything by jumpin' on him. Ef we go slow there is a chance ter get at the whole biz in our way."

"You're solid," admitted Cal.

Hecla and Molly had gained their balance,

and it was not all that Molly had gained. She regarded the would-be rescuers with angry eyes.

"I'm surprised at you, Rob Burns!" she declared.

"Whar'fore?" he asked.

"Why didn't you nab that feller?"

"He skipped."

"You might have chased him."

"So you could."

"Don't you answer me back that way!" snapped Molly, bringing her small foot down with emphasis. "I say you're real mean!"

"Oh! come now, my lady, don't jump on a chap in that reckless way," good-humoredly requested Robert. "Remember I'm a sharp on these things, an' find out my motive afore you set yer proud heels onter my anatomy. You leave Jack-rabbit Webber ter me, an' you'll see him chewin' hash in Sing Sing afore many moons."

Hecla came forward.

"Nobody blames you," she said, kindly.

"My enemy has not escaped yet, and he shall not."

CHAPTER VIII.

GETTING A START.

"THAT'S the talk!" cried Detective Bob. "We ain't ter be beat, an' Mister Webber will find he has tackled a thrashin'-machine, by jinks! But how come you both here?"

Hecla sighed.

"I could not rest in the house when there was so much I wanted to do, so I went out to walk all alone. I thought I might see Henry Corliss. I came upon this young girl and asked her to walk with me, and she did so. Then we happened upon Webber, and I could not resist the impulse to accost him."

"Nor me!" grimly added Molly. "I accosted him, an' I guess he will carry the marks o' my finger-nails fer one day."

"Bully fer you, my daisy!" exclaimed Robert. "You did let inter him luscious, an' no mistake."

"An' you let him escape!"

Molly looked at the Rattler reprovingly. Her anger had vanished, but she was not convinced that it had been wise to let the sport go as he had.

"You're a fighter from 'Wayback," agreed Robert, "but prudence is sometimes the best game out. Let's go slow, but we'll have Mister Jack yet, an' don't you doubt et. We four kin beat him all holler. We'll jest cruise around the Bowery an' vicinity until we do him up. Yes, b'jinks! we will be the Big Four o' the Bowery."

The idea pleased the jockey, and he showed his teeth in a broad smile of approval.

"Count me in," he requested.

"I'm afraid Molly and I shall be of but little use," added Hecla.

"Don't you think that," retorted Molly.

"I'm as good as a man in all but fightin'." "So you both be, an' you shall see the Big Four will give a good account o' themselves," promised Robert.

The Rattler did not see fit to tell of the latest discoveries he had made, and his present duty seemed only to see that the two weaker members of the party got home in safety. This was done, and then Robert walked over to the Bowery with Cal, that being the present sleeping place of the jockey.

"Only fer awhile, though," he added, "fer I expect a new situation where I kin get all the track-ridin' I want. Et won't be with Mister Jack Webber, though."

The two boys entered the hotel to which Cal had referred, Robert going out of idle curiosity. He found it a place where fastidious persons would not wish to pass their time, but Cal had roughed it all his life, and did not mind such things.

Not long did the Rattler delay, for the hour was getting late, and when he left he went at once to the house of his parent. There he put in a good night's sleep, and, ac-

cording to promise, was at the hotel again early in the morning—so early that Cal was not yet up.

Robert sat down by the window in the office and looked around idly.

Two men were there, engaged in conversation, and he half-unconsciously began to listen to what they said.

Both looked as if they were but one notch above the tramp order, and it was clear that they were to be considered as doubtful citizens in one way if not in another. Robert heard little that was of interest until several minutes had passed. Then one of the pair remarked:

"I've got a good thing under way."

"What is it?" asked his comrade.

"Confidential agent to a man."

"How is that?"

"I suspect he is dodgin' the perleecce. Anyhow, he's in hidin' fer some reason, an' I'm ter act for him. Et took us a long time to make the bargain, fer he has to pay me in promises."

"Promises? Bah! do you take such pay?"

"Dusty, you an' me are gentlemen of the world—cosmopolitan spirits, as I may say—an' we know how risky et is, but when I see this bloke could pay no other way, I agreed to help with promises fer pay, ye see."

"What's he done?"

"Shot a man!"

"You don't say so!"

"Wal, I can't prove et, but when I read about the case, he got so flustered that I believed he was the one who did et. Did you hear about the man on the Bowery who shot the perleeceman?"

Risky Robert started.

"Do ye mean that young Corliss?" asked the second tramp.

"Yes."

"I did hear of et. Ef you have him cornered, why don't you tell the coppers an' get credit fer it?"

"I am going ter take my chances of makin' more out of et by sidin' with the young feller. Ef he pulls out, I believe I shall do well, an' I have put my faith on him. At his request I went ter the house where the shootin' was done, ter look fer a family named Petersen, but I did not find them. They had shuffled out, bag an' baggage."

"Got left, then?"

"Yes, but I ain't all done. I'm ter see my boss this eve an' receive further directions."

"Where is he?"

"Can't tell ye. I won't tell nobody—orders is too strict."

"All right; it ain't my affair."

"Ef I was approached by anybody on the subject, I wouldn't let on a word. I'll stick by him, an' orders is—Keep mum!"

Conversation wandered to other matters, but Risky Robert had heard enough to interest him. Like the tramp, he believed it was Henry Corliss who was acting this secret part, and he began to consider how he could profit by it. He wished to see Corliss and get further directions from him, so as to act with wisdom in his detective scheme, but it was plain he could not rely upon the tramp to help him out.

How, then, could he find Henry?

This question was put in the way of solution by the men themselves. "Dusty" rose to go, saying:

"When do I see you again, Jigs?"

"I have ter go to my employer this eve at eight o'clock. Meet me at the corner of Bond street and the Bowery at seven, an' we will have a bottle together, ef we kin raise the price."

"I'll be with ye, Jigs."

Dusty went his way, and Jigs proceeded to fall into a sound sleep.

Cal Demorest soon came down, and was duly greeted by Robert, but the latter had new and most important things on his mind.

He considered the possibility of keeping Jigs under watch during the day, but it was such a formidable undertaking that he decided to rely upon the engagement he had heard the two tramps make, and risk or fall by it.

He and Cal kept busy during the day, but they did not succeed in making any new discoveries.

Before seven o'clock Robert was at the corner of Bond street and the Bowery, and on the watch for the men. They did not disappoint him or each other, but came quite promptly.

Going into a saloon they had the drink so much coveted, and then the Rattler had only to await their parting. When they did this Jigs went on alone, but not unwatched. Detective Bob was as close after as was safe, and he never wavered in the hunt.

When Jigs paused it was before a building which looked as if it might have been standing when Columbus set sail from the shores of Europe. Possibly the house had once been of elegance, but the day was long past. Now, it was chiefly noticeable for the sign over the door which announced that rooms for the night could be had for fifteen cents.

"Yes, with twenty in a room," thought wise Robert. "Reg'lar lodgin' house, with cockroaches and bedbugs thrown in. Has Henry come ter this? Adversity brings us on our knee-caps."

Jigs entered, and so did the Rattler.

Following his guide the boy was soon in a room where he saw his suspicions all confirmed. It was a lodging-house, and the patrons were decidedly of the gone-to-seed order. Robert flashed a quick glance around, but failed to discover Henry Corliss.

Jigs went to the desk and transacted some business, but Robert took a seat. He did not long keep it in quiet. One of the men connected with the place approached him.

"Goin' ter see the clerk?" he asked.

"Guess not."

"Then git!"

"How's that?"

"This ain't a free snoozin' place, nor a warmin'-up place. Ef you can't rise the price, git. Ef you are to stay with us, walk up an' settle."

Robert understood, and he went to the desk and paid the fifteen cents which entitled him to the luxuries of the establishment for the night. This done he turned around to see what Jigs was doing.

"Buzzin' another tramp," muttered Robert. "Fine specimen the other is, too, with his rags standin' up on end like sails on a Flyin' Dutchman ship."

With this scornful comment the Rattler was about to cease giving attention to the pair, but their earnest air so indicated important business that his gaze did not wander so soon as he had expected.

"Solid biz, that is. Have I seen the unknown afore? Somehow, he has a sorter familiar look."

Sharper gazed the Rattler, and then a sudden discovery came.

"Great guns!" he gasped, "et's Henry Corliss!"

CHAPTER IX.

ROBERT'S ROUGH ROAD.

COMPLETE was the surprise, and, even when Detective Bob had arrived at the decision that he was looking at Corliss, he did not feel wholly sure of his opinion. Yet, it was true.

Corliss was in disguise, and Robert had never seen a more perfect one. Not only had the young man's good clothing been displaced by rags but his hair had been trimmed close, his mustache sacrificed and his face browned with some solution.

Marked was the change.

Having satisfied himself fully the Rattler

looked for a chance to get close enough to the pair to see what they were talking about, but he could find no way to do it.

Other tramps hemmed them in, and for him to push his way to where he could listen would be to invite some discovery from Corliss.

"Et's prudence fer me to wait until he an' Jigs break up," thought the detective amateur. "Then I will sail in an' tell Henry he must do the pretty by his friends."

He had some time to wait, for Henry and Jigs seemed to find their own talk very interesting, and worthy of long attention.

Robert tried to kill time, and, in doing this, he gave attention to the other inmates of the room. A hard lot they were, as a rule, and their besotted, debased faces furnished study and interest.

Finally Robert's wandering gaze grew still.

"Where have I seen that jigger?" he wondered.

It was a very ragged, dirty fellow to whom he referred, yet the half-made recognition seemed to require more than the rags to explain who he was. Robert studied for awhile, but was unable to grasp the meaning of it.

"I never was in a den o' this sort before," he thought, with a smile of amusement, "yet I seem ter find a good many friends here. The first was Henry, an' now et's this feller. Wonder ef they hang on the same bush?"

It was the most idle of mental interrogations, but it led to an idea. Unwittingly he had stumbled upon the solution of the mystery. More keenly he looked, and then discovery followed.

"Jee-whiz! et's the detective!"

Singular and startling discovery! Unless his eyes wholly deceived him the man was that one of the detectives who had escaped the bullet when the arrest of Corliss was attempted, and it was no small matter.

"He's after Henry, sure as you live!" murmured the Rattler.

The suspicion was so reasonable that, once gained, he did not waver in his belief, and he at first expected to see the arrest follow speedily, but this opinion was changed as he looked more closely.

The detective's eyes were seldom at rest. He acted with commendable prudence, but he was taking a look at all in the room, and the fact that his gaze was so reckless led Robert to a conclusion.

"He don't know Henry. He may be sure he is here, or only suspect et, but he ain't sure any further: He don't know which he is."

There was nothing to change this idea, and the situation grew very interesting to the Rattler. The detective was on the track, but he had yet to get his grip fully.

He and Henry were mutually unconscious of the fact that they were so near each other, and it was Robert, alone, who had the full key to the situation.

"Probably," decided the Rattler, "he has found out that the fugitive is in the habit o' puttin' up here, but he don't know him. Wal, ef he finds et all out there will be the liveliest time fer Henry around here that he ever had. b'jinks!"

Bob shook his head gloomily.

"Bad outlook! I must warn the boy."

This was not easy. Corliss was talking with Jigs and to get near and speak with him unseen and unheard by any one else was out of the question. On the other hand, if he went to him and requested private conversation it would attract attention, and, as Robert had been present at the vain attempt to arrest Henry, it would be easy for the detective, with his attention thus drawn, to recognize him, and perhaps the recognition of Corliss would follow.

"I mustn't do et. Go light an' slow, Robert, an' size yer chance when ye see et."

He waited, but the situation was a long while in changing.

Finally Henry and Jigs rose and passed into the next room. When the door closed Robert could see no more of them, but, after hesitating awhile as to his proper course, he decided to see if the chance had come.

He rose and followed.

As he passed the door he saw he was in the sleeping part of the lodging-house, and a curious place it was.

On each side there was a row of small inclosures much like horsestalls, each with a curtain in front of it, and it was easy to see that these were the "rooms" which the proprietor advertised to furnish for fifteen cents.

Henry and Jigs had disappeared, but, realizing that they had gone into one of the inclosures, Robert pressed forward to see which one held them.

He was at once accosted by a man who evidently had charge of the place, and who looked villainous enough to be a murderer, himself.

"What number?" he growled.

"Eh?" replied Robert.

"Check!"

"I ain't got none—"

"Go and get it."

"I want ter see the gents who just came in—"

"Wait until mornin'."

"But I want ter see them now."

"Against the rules. Get out!"

"But I only want a bit o' talk—"

"No talking is allowed in this room, an' you can't work no bluff. See them in the morning. Get your check, or go out into the street."

Robert was not a little discomposed by this rough treatment, which was plainly that of a bully in power, but he saw no way of rebelling against it. The last words were a clear indication of the fact that he would be ejected wholly if he did not act with discretion.

Seeing no better way to do he decided to obey fully—and then await developments.

Reluctantly he returned to the outer room and secured his check at the desk. Armed with this he returned, and the ugly guardian took him in tow and escorted him to one of the stalls. Sweeping the curtain aside the bully growled:

"Get to bed at once!"

"But there is one feller in there already."

"Room fer two; this is your place. Get in!"

The bully gave Bob a shove and then dropped the curtain. The Rattler gazed with some dismay. He was called upon to be bedfellow with about the most disreputable-looking person he had ever seen, and the fact shocked the clean-clad boy.

His first impulse was to refuse wholly, but he remembered that he was a self appointed detective, gave a thought to the genuine member of that fraternity who was apparently willing to endure just as much in the cause, and made a bold push and turned in.

The bed, so called, was simply a foundation of boards nailed to the sides of the partitions, wide enough for two, and covered with scant clothing.

Rattler's partner seemed in the dim light to be sleeping, and his presence was offensive simply because he was not clean.

"What am I inter?" wondered Robert.

"Here I be, but what good does et do me? How am I ter warn Henry, with that Sing Sing feller ready ter bite my head off ef I say a word, or stir?"

It was a question which needed thought to get the answer.

This originally-arranged lodging-house seemed to trouble nobody but Robert, but he did not like it. He wished to get chance to speak with Henry, but it was just as sure as fate that if he angered the ugly guard all chance would be lost.

So Robert lay still and meditated.

Time passed. Other men came in and went to bed, but what had become of the detective, or in what stall Henry Corliss was, the Rattler did not know.

"Mebbe ef the detective is only suspicious in a general way there will be no ruction," thought the boy. "Anyhow, all I can do is to lie still an' see what will happen."

This he did, and the room gradually became quiet. All had gone to their rest who were to be there, and the guard was quiet. That he was not absent the Rattler learned by looking out of his pen, for there sat the fellow with the old, surly look on his face.

The room had two rows of stalls running the whole length, the feet of the sleepers being toward the interior. On one side the heads were directly toward the wall, but on the other, to make the windows free, there was a passage about three feet wide. It was on this side that Robert was.

He judged that it was about midnight when this fact first became of interest to him.

He heard something in the passage—something like the soft fall of feet, as if some one was creeping along the passage.

To this Robert gave no attention until a brief cessation of the sounds was followed by another kind of sound just above him.

He looked up and was startled by what he saw.

CHAPTER X.

A FREE FIGHT.

DARK as the room was there was a faint area of light near the windows, and, as this was so near, the darkness was there dispelled a little. By the aid of this light Robert saw a human head outlined, and so situated that he could not fail to understand it.

Some one was looking over the partition from the passage.

The Rattler grew interested immediately. What did all this mean? Clearly, the person was not the ugly guard, for he would not have been skulking around so secretly in the passage.

Then who was it, and what was his purpose in acting thus?

Once Robert opened his lips to speak, but he changed his mind and waited. The prowler must have time to show his hand, and if he was inclined to do so the heavy breathing of Bob's companion was enough to encourage him.

That it did just that was soon shown.

Suddenly a ray of light shot down upon the bed. It was a dark-lantern, and was clearly a search-light venture.

At first it fell upon the unknown sleeper, and before it was turned upon the Rattler, he had time to see a good deal.

The spy was the disguised detective.

Robert closed his eyes in good season, and when the ray struck him he was very innocent of look. Awhile the investigation was kept up and then the light was shut off and the man withdrew. Robert heard him descend on the other side of the partition.

"B'jinks! he's out fer gore!" muttered the Rattler. "I don't exactly get onto his game, but he's after Henry. Must be he didn't size him up before, an' he thinks he missed him, an' will find him in one o' the dens, asleep. Aha! this is growin' hilarious."

If it was not "hilarious" it was, at least, decidedly interesting to the Rattler, and he felt too much stirred up to lie where he was and let the affair go on without notice from him.

He slipped out of bed and gazed beyond the curtain.

The guard was sleeping, which explained why he had not seen the light shown by the detective.

Detective Bob was tempted to make some sound which would put him on the alert, but he thought better of it and kept quiet. Watching, he saw the searcher go to other inclosures and peer within, but he gained the end of the row without betraying to the boy that he had made any discovery.

Then followed another lull, but Robert was so sure it would be broken that he did not return to bed. Shortly after the detective appeared at the door which led into the room and surveyed the guard keenly for awhile, after which he crept into the room, himself.

Across the floor he went like a cat.

When he did not look at the guard his gaze was on one of the stalls, and the Rattler was not slow to suspect that he had an idea where Corliss was.

"This must be stopped," thought Robert, "but how?"

The detective reached the curtain. He passed inside.

"Count me in!" muttered the watcher.

Cautiously he left his own inclosure and made his way across the floor. Vague as all things were he was looking for something which would be unpleasant for Henry Corliss, and he intended to have a share of it. At that time he forgot utterly that it was a struggle between an accused person and an officer, and remembered only that his sympathies were with Henry.

The Rattler was liable to do something he would be sorry for later on.

He, too, reached the curtain.

Pushing it aside he saw the detective inside, stooping over one of the two sleepers.

In such poor light Robert could distinguish but little, but the officer, bending over his men, could do no more. He seemed to satisfy himself, for he suddenly raised his head, fumbled in his pocket and took out something. What was it?

For a moment Robert's wits did not work with their accustomed rapidity, but the truth then flashed upon him.

"Handcuffs!" he thought, with a start. "Jee-whiz! ef he gets them on et's all up with Harry!"

Acting impulsively the boy leaped forward. The detective heard the first sound of alarm, as his slight movement told, but he was not to be turned from his purpose.

There was a click and the sleeper was ironed.

A sleeper he ceased to be in short order, for he started up with a cry like one from a nightmare.

"Save me!" he cried.

It was not a systematic appeal, but it worked just as effectually as if he had clear comprehension of the situation. Robert had utterly forgotten all except that the man in whom he was interested was in great danger—it was nothing to him, then, that an officer was opposed to them, for the simple reason that he did not remember it—and he leaped forward to the rescue like a young catamount.

Twining his arms around the detective he cried:

"Let up, ye pesky snake! You can't work yer game here!"

The assault was so fierce that the detective was for the moment powerless against it. He reeled back and barely managed to save himself from falling.

Recovering in a measure he turned a savage face toward his assailant and exclaimed:

"Hands off, you scoundrell!"

"Nary off!" retorted Bob.

"Take that!"

The officer intended to accompany the words with a blow, but he aimed but poorly. He failed to "find" the Rattler, and the latter still hung on tenaciously.

In the meanwhile the ironed man, who was, as Robert was now sure, Henry Corliss, had been sitting up. The shock had come so suddenly that he was a good deal stupefied, but he was slowly recovering his wits. His

past apprehension of danger, the struggle near him and the irons on his wrists all served to enlighten him, and he now leaped to his feet and fled from the stall.

Just then, too, there was a crash, and the two struggling persons fell to the floor together.

Robert began to be rattled. It occurred to him that he had undertaken a big contract, and he became willing to give it up. The detective had a firm grasp on him, but the boy did not let that have undue influence. He managed to wriggle away just as the guard came rushing in with hasty steps.

"What's goin' on?" roared the guard, ferociously. "I'll learn ye not to kick up a row here!"

This he proceeded to do, and heavy blows fell impartially upon Robert and the detective.

"I'll mash ye all inter bits!" he reiterated.

The detective did not like the plan, and he remonstrated warmly, but without avail. Fast as ever fell the blows, and the officer grew angry. He grappled with his assailant, and they began to fight with zeal.

"This is my chance!" muttered the Rattler, and he fled from the inclosure.

Once outside he looked for Henry, but nothing was to be seen of him. The regular patrons of the lodging-house were now awake, and they perversely added to the racket by shouting with anger or derision. It bade fair to be a lively scene before it was all over.

Out into the first room went Bob. Henry was not there.

"B'jinks! he's gone inter the street," added Robert. "I must look fer him there."

So the Rattler followed, but when the street was reached he saw the disadvantage of starting late. Time had been allowed Henry to get away from the house, and he had improved the opportunity.

"Nowhere in sight," muttered the boy, disconsolately. "This is what I call tough. Here I am, ready ter help him, but where is he? The feller has skipped, an' I'll be shot ef he ain't gone with the irons on his wrists. Whew! ain't he in a peck o' trouble?"

Robert stood still, his gaze wandering quickly about. He felt that he was the only one who could help Corliss, and Corliss was gone. Pursuit was necessary, but which way was the pursuer to go?

Sounds above indicated that the detective was likely to be on the scene shortly, and it would not do to hesitate longer. Unless he wished to be arrested, himself, the Rattler must get out of sight.

Acting blindly he moved off down the Bowery.

It then lacked but half an hour of twelve o'clock, and the street was beginning to lose the density of the throng to be seen there at a time a little earlier. Thus, Robert could see pretty well in advance, and there was no Corliss visible.

"Turned inter a side-street, like ez not," was his comment. "I'll bone somebody round here an' see ef they kin shed light on the subject."

This he did, but his cautious questioning failed to develop anything. He dared not ask if a man had been seen who wore a handcuff, but nobody would admit having seen a person who resembled Henry.

Robert was still working on the blind clue when a hand was laid on his arm. He turned suddenly and saw what appeared to be a youth of about his own age.

"Have you found him?" asked this person.

"Found who?" returned Robert.

The answer which followed gave him a shock.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BOWERY WOLVES.

"I REFER to Henry Corliss!"

The words fell forcibly upon Detective Bob's ears.

"Say, what be ye givin' us?" he replied.

It was an attempt at bravado, and not very successful, though well planned. The other questioner looked surprised.

"Are you not searching for him?" was asked.

"Never heard o' sech a feller," stoutly declared the Rattler.

"Why, don't you know us, Robert Burns?" demanded another voice.

The Rattler turned his gaze, and what he saw almost caused him to fall in a fit. Another seeming boy was there, but this time he was not deceived. He flashed a glance to the first speaker and then whistled softly.

"Great guns!" he exclaimed. "What hev I struck here?"

For he was face to face with Hecla Petersen and Molly, both dressed as boys, and it gave him a decided shock.

"We are tryin' ter find Henry Corliss," added Molly.

"You'll find somebody else, first, an' that is a copper, b'jinks!" asserted Robert. "Hev you two gone clean crazy? Molly, you're a New York girl, an' you ought to hev known better than this. Don't ye know it's ag'in the law fer you to be dressed up as you be? Why, great Cicero, ef the perleece see you are gals in disguise they will pull ye in so quick et will make yer back teeth rattle!"

"They ain't seen et, yet."

"But they will. A gal may put on a bushel o' boy's clothes, but she don't look like a boy, an' she can't prance around like one. She steps with a teeter, an' she wobbles her shoulders until they make bows ter each other. Oh! you can't come et, Molly."

"Now, don't you think you're smart!" retorted Molly, with spirit. "What you know about girls would fill a thimble, ef the thimble wa'n't too big. We've gone around so fur all right, an' we'll keep et up, Mister Burns!"

Robert shook his head dismally.

"Ain't we part o' the Big Four?" added Molly.

The Rattler brightened.

"You be, fer sure."

"Then don't snub us."

"Correct, old lady! Go yer gait, an' I'll do all I kin ter help ye. Hev you seen Henry?"

"No."

"Funny where he is."

"Have you been searching?" asked Hecla.

"Yes."

"Where can he be?" and Hecla sighed deeply.

Again the Rattler shook his head. He did not see fit to tell the latest news about Corliss, for he knew they could do him no good until he was found, and to tell all would be to frighten Hecla without any corresponding gain.

Molly's anger had begun to disappear, and she became more communicative. Briskly she explained:

"Hecla wanted to do somethin' herself ter help, an' I told her et was no more than right that all the members o' the Big Four should be up an' doin', so we put on these boys' clothes. Now, ain't et jest great?"

"Et must be, ef you say so."

"Ain't we jest ez likely to find Henry as you be?"

"Yes."

"Wal, that is our line o' biz."

"Keep et up," answered Robert, more amiably.

"Let's all scatter, now, an' sorter patrol the Bowery."

"All right. But see here, girls, ef you find Henry, et ain't likely he will be in his swell clothes. He will want a disguise, so he's likely to put on old clothes, a good 'eal like a tramp."

With this hint of the condition he really knew the hunted man to be in, Robert allowed the work to begin. The three members of the Big Four scattered along the

street and looked at every one they could see.

To many timid persons this task of the night-time would have been anything but pleasant. Among those now on the Bowery, there were many who were so filled with bad whisky that they were in quarrelsome mood, and Hecla and Molly were taking chances.

For this brave Molly cared but little, for her life had been one of street and garret in the vicinity, but Hecla had only her devotion to Corliss to buoy her up.

Dimly burned the lights of the street as the three took up their watch, and the peculiar illusions of midnight were upon all things.

"I've found the Bowery a right pleasant place ter live in," thought Robert, "but there is them who would think this a rather dubious place to cruise around in, now. The drunks are getting more room as others falls off, an' the tough prowls ter see whom he may devour an' eat up. Hope none o' them will fall in with my aids."

Uneasily Robert glanced toward Hecla. He knew, if she did not, that danger of legal arrest was not the only risk she was taking, and he felt by honor bound to see her through in safety.

"Who be them critters that is eyin' of her so keen?"

The question passed Robert's lips abruptly as he took the glance indicated. Two rough-looking fellows had stopped near her and were regarding her sharply.

Loyal Robert did not delay to see more; he moved in that direction immediately. He was too shrewd to make a wild rush and attract attention to him, but with a cautious and cunning advance he gained the point desired.

Then a discovery followed.

"Pete an' another feller!"

It was, indeed, the tough whom he had seen at the house where "Cap Bunker's" band held their meeting, and he was prepared to believe without more evidence that some villainy was under way.

"They know she's a gal, in spite of her clothes," was his verdict, and it was a most annoying one. "They look at her like a shark sizin' up his victim."

Robert named the situation well, and he was soon shown there was more need of his attention. Hecla was standing by a pillar of the Elevated Road, gazing at the passers, and Pete suddenly walked close to her.

"Hullo, ole man!" was the rough's greeting.

She started nervously and turned so as to face him.

"Fine eve, ain't et?" added Pete.

She looked and said nothing. It was plain she was frightened, and could not command her voice.

Pete was using his eyes keenly, and Robert was more than ever convinced that he had penetrated Hecla's secret. The boy would have interfered, but there was a faint hope that Pete would tire of his object, or be scared away by a policeman.

The fellow seized Hecla's arm.

"Come and have a drink!" he went on.

The girl uttered a frightened cry and tried to break away from the obnoxious hold. This she did not succeed in doing, and Robert waited for no more. There was a gleam in Pete's eyes which told that he was capable of any degree of mischief, and it was time to interfere.

The Rattler sprang forward and struck the offensive arm a blow which made the hand fall.

Pete, still feeling the pain, turned with an angry snort. Believing himself a fighting man he was ready for something of the sort, and it was a surprise to see only a boy.

"Thunder!" he exclaimed. "What— Was et you who did et?"

"Sure-pop!" replied Bob, coolly.

"You hit me?"

"Didn't ye feel et?"

"How dared ye? What hev you ter do about et?"

"That girl is my sister," calmly answered Robert.

"I don't care ef she's yer grandmother!" snapped Pete. "How dared ye? How dared ye hit me?"

"Didn't take no nerve at all. Why, ef you had molested her any more than you did I would hev smashed yer old arm inter cinders, b'jinks! Ketch on?"

"No back talk!"

"Oh! go an' butt yer head ag'in' that pillar!"

The cool contempt of the boy, as much as his words, acted on Pete much like a spur. It hurt him in a way, and he let his wrath have full play.

"I'll learn ye!" he cried, and he made a dive for Robert.

Through space went the huge bulk. Its owner expected to get his hands on his youthful foe, but that was one of his errors of judgment. Robert stepped to one side, keeping nothing in Pete's path but a cunningly-placed foot, and the result of the trick was that Pete's toe caught on the obstruction.

He fell with force which brought a groan from his lips, and, once there, he lay squirming. The hard curbstone had hurt his bones.

"Break the young hound in two!" he snarled.

Tough Number Two had looked on in wonder, amazed to see his comrade so severely used, but he now felt called upon to do more than look. Revenge must be sought, and he went about it.

He, too, dove toward Robert on mischief intent, his lips parting with the threat:

"I'll smash you inter nothin', you fresh kid! Take that!"

And he swung his fist for a telling blow.

CHAPTER XII.

UPS AND DOWNS OF THE NIGHT.

THE speaker meant to do all he threatened, but again Fate proved perverse—with the aid of a human being. It was not likely that he could have hit any one as agile as Robert was, but he did not get the chance. He came to grief more emphatically than had Pete.

Suddenly he felt a sensation as if he had been hit by an earthquake, and he pitched over on top of his comrade.

The two toughs were sprawling together, while just back of them stood a colored boy, raising his head after a good, solid "butt" in the tough's ribs.

"Cal Demorest!" cried Robert.

"You bet!" replied the jockey. "I won't be missin' when the Big Four hold a sociable."

He was not missing, and the way he had driven his hard head into the fellow's ribs was very telling and, to the latter, uncomfortable. Still, the allies had to deal with men hard to put out of the way, and they scrambled to their feet.

"Scoot!" had been Robert's advice, as he saw them come up, but Hecla did not obey.

She seemed to be rendered motionless with fright, and she stood still until the Rattler caught her arm.

"Hustle!" he urged.

It was advice to be heeded or all would be lost, and she managed to move, but Robert at once saw that she would not succeed in out-running them, for she could not yet do justice to herself.

He had a new idea and made use of it.

"Perleece!" he cried. "This way, officer!"

He had seen no one, but the cry was one which appealed strongly to the fears of the toughs. They looked around and did see a patrolman not far away, and the sight brought them to their senses.

"Let up!" advised Pete, hurriedly. "We must skip!"

"What's all this row about?"

It was a new voice, and all looked to see who had spoken. Robert felt like giving up for a moment as he recognized Jack Webber. It was not that he was any more afraid of the horse-owner than of his tools, but he expected something else.

Hecla had wished to see Jack Webber; she did see him now. Robert sent a quick, anxious glance toward her. Her gaze was on Jack. The latter had scarcely given her a look, but her eyes were large with the emotion of the discovery.

She sprang toward the horse-owner.

"Where is our bond?" she cried.

Jack changed his own regard. He looked with bewilderment, failing to recognize her.

"Give it back!" she added nervously.

"What?" he muttered. "Who are you? What do you— Great heavens!"

He needed no explanation then.

"I demand what is mine!" the girl insisted, with growing force.

"I have nothing which is yours," replied Jack, with a strong effort to regain his composure.

"You have the bond."

"Indeed, I have not," was the nervous claim, as Jack looked around and saw how many witnesses there were to the scene. "Corliss was to give it to me and I was to cash it, or otherwise, but he never handed it over."

"It is false!"

"Where is your proof?"

"His word."

"A thing of straw."

"He would not lie to me, and I know it. You took the bond to get money for us—so you promised—and you have betrayed your trust. You are a thief, but you shall not reap the fruits of your treachery. I will have you arrested."

"Here's a copper," added Robert.

Jack cast a quick glance around, and then made a movement as if to flee. Hecla promptly seized him.

"You shall not go!" she cried.

The patrolman was at hand. He was a very prepossessing looking person, himself. He had a rough nature, and long experience with scenes in the Bowery had hardened him more than ever Nature had intended.

"What's all this racket?" he demanded, harshly.

"This man is a thief!" declared Hecla.

"It's false!" asserted Jack. "You know me, Hoskett."

"I do that, Mr. Webber," the policeman replied.

"Am I a thief?"

"No more than I be," answered the patrolman, and possibly he told the truth.

"Then, of course, you will take no notice of this affair?"

"All I shall do," replied the officer, with a wave of his night stick, "will be to order them to move on."

"How's that?" demanded Robert. "Didn't you hear the young lady tell now he stole her bond?"

"I know Mr. Webber, and it's all right. He would not wrong anybody, and I know it."

"Be you a perleeceeman or a judge?"

"What's that?"

"Inside court is the place ter decide this."

"No back talk!" frowned the patrolman.

"I ain't ter be disputed with by no ragamuffin like you. Git!"

"What?"

"Git!"

"Not much, I won't, until you hev done the right thing. Et ain't fer you ter say who is guilty, an' who is not guilty. We tell you ter run Jack Webber in, an' that's your duty."

"You preach ter me any more about my duty an' I'll give ye a smash in the jaw!" le-

clared the model officer, waving his club close to the jaw he had referred to. "Did you hear me say, Git?"

"Did you see me do et?" retorted Robert.

"No, but you shall!"

Forward the patrolman moved, but Hecla interposed.

"Surely, you will not do this injustice!" she exclaimed.

"Surely, an' I'll clear this sidewalk of all of New York stands up and howls against it. No loitering here, or I'll run you all in."

"This one," added Pete, pointing to Hecla, "is a girl in boy's clothes."

"What!" cried Hoskett. "You don't say so! Why, that's a clear violation of law, and I'll take her to the station, sure."

"No," said Jack. "It is my wish that you do not do so. All I desire is that you will keep her from annoying me, and this you will please do."

"I will!"

Again the patrolman moved forward. Hecla and her friends remonstrated, but it was all in vain. Robert did his best to prevent the injustice, but without favorable result, and he soon decided that the attempt was a mistake, for when, seeing he could do no good, he turned again to look for Jack, he did not see him.

The sport had taken advantage of the excitement to slip away.

He had made good his escape.

Resistance angered the officer, and, being aware that, despite Jack's expressed wishes, there was danger of Hecla's being arrested if the matter was not allowed to drop, Robert did what was prudent. He spoke to Hecla and managed to get her away in safety.

In a short time the now-vanquished Big Four were near the home of the senior Mr. Burns.

"Don't look so down-hearted," advised the Rattler, cheerfully. "This is only a temporary set-back, an' you will see that we are still in the swim. I am beginnin' ter git Jacky Web down fine, an' he can't escape me. Not for a cent!"

"We have seen his power, to-night!" sighed Hecla.

"He will see ours next inning," retorted Robert, "an' et will kinder shock him."

"Ef you don't beat him 'out I'll never speak to you again, Rob Burns!" asserted Molly.

"My queen, when I'm done with Jacky he will look as ef the Post Office had fell over on him an' mashed him flat!"

With this confident assertion Robert conducted his charges home, but after Hecla and Molly had gone indoors Robert and Cal lingered outside and the Rattler told Cal all that had occurred.

"I don't s'pose et will do any good," he added, "but I must take one more turn ter see ef I kin find Henry. Jee-whiz! jest think o' that pard of ours climbin' around the streets o' New York with his wrists hugged in handcuffs!"

"Big handicap," agreed Cal, with a faint smile at his own joke.

"Makes my hair teeter all over my head with emotion. Now, Calhoun, I'm goin' out ter look fer our prodigal, useless as et seems. Are you with me?"

"I be, as long as my 'mount' stays in the race."

With this understanding the allies sought the Bowery again, but not to linger there. With the irons on his wrists Henry Corliss would hardly venture to be seen there, and he was more likely to be found in the cross streets.

"An' I don't see that he can go anywhere else," remarked Robert, disconsolately. "Lodging-houses seem ter be his only home, an' he can't apply to them with the irons on. Tell ye what, Cal, things are in a desperate pickle, now, an' ef we don't score a win the goose is cooked."

CHAPTER XIII.

A MYSTERIOUS WANDERER.

A MAN walked into an alley with slow and furtive steps. He had just come from the street, where his manner had been equally peculiar. He had skulked along like one afraid of notice, turning to get wholly out of sight when he chanced to see a policeman, and avoiding all persons.

So might a hunted man have gone abroad in Gotham.

There was another singular thing about this man. During all his walk he had carried his hands concealed under the front of his sack coat—a most unusual thing to do. It made his appearance awkward, and, as the weather was not cold, would have attracted attention if he had met any one who was suspicious.

When he entered the alley he did not make any change.

Looking sharply ahead he moved cautiously along the dark way.

"All seems silent and deserted here," he muttered. "It may furnish an opportunity for me to rest for the night—to be free for awhile from danger; and if I gain this reprieve I may be able to remove these things."

He looked down at his coat, but his mind was not on the coat, so much as the hands under it. Something about the hands, invisible though they were, held his attention.

Into the alley he went even deeper. It widened into a little court, or, more properly, a space where several back yards were without dividing fences. Two or three old buildings stood there; small, tumble-down structures which had seen their day, even in this district of poverty, and the man hailed them with pleasure.

"Hoped!" he muttered. "If I can be free to myself I may be able to do something."

He went on until the buildings were reached. Then he had a severe shock, for a voice suddenly sounded:

"Hallo, stranger!"

He gave a nervous start, and then turned his gaze toward the direction of the voice. He saw three men sitting on a box.

"Sit down and have a talk with us," added the last speaker.

The new-comer tried still harder to see just what they were.

"Probable they are tramps," he thought, "and if they are, they may help me."

It was a singular conclusion to arrive at, but the new-comer was singularly placed. He thought he had reasons for believing that tramps might be the best friends he could find.

"I don't care if I do," he answered.

He went forward and they made room for him on the box. He sat down somewhat stiffly, for the position of his hands did not render motion easy, and then felt uneasy himself, because he saw he was being made the focus of every glance.

One of the trio shoved forward a can.

"Try the growler," he requested.

"I am not thirsty."

"It will cheer you up."

"I am quite cheerful, now."

"Pshaw! have a drink, man!"

"I can't do it. Beer goes to my head, and I feel like a fool after taking it. I am much obliged, but I can't drink."

The explanation was all right, but, while it was being made, the can was held under the new-comer's nose and he never moved his hands from the novel place where he carried them.

The beer-offerer looked down at the coat and added:

"Are you a man without hands?"

Something made the stranger flush deeply. He replied hastily:

"I have a trouble of the arm, and am almost a cripple."

"Oh!"

To the new-comer his explanation seemed

very transparent, but it was not questioned. It had served to put the brief curiosity out of their minds, and it was successful thus far. They said no more about drinking.

He was not so much at ease. He had found that he was not among tramps. Plain men they were of the honest laboring class in life, if he judged correctly, and the fact that one of them carried what looked like a night watchman's stick showed even more of their rank.

He thought he had no use for them, and began to study how he could get away speedily, and without exciting comment. While he was thus occupied other footsteps sounded and another man walked into the court.

The person with the hidden hands almost fell off the box as he saw that it was a policeman. If his face could have been seen in the darkness it would have proved very pale, just then.

Much to his relief the officer was gazing at the others.

"Well, gents, how goes it?" asked the blue-coat.

"All right. How is it with you?"

"Great! Not a row on my beat, to-night, so I thought I'd slide in and see if the growler was working."

"It is, sure, and here's the proof of it. Take a pull."

"I will."

The officer did so, and seemed to enjoy the feast. Evidently he was in the habit of seeing these congenial spirits, and accepting their invitations. Having satisfied his thirst he began to swing his club carelessly.

"Any news?" asked one of his friends.

"Murder over on the West side—too far away to interest me."

"People are too good around here for that sort of thing," remarked the night-watchman, with a smile at his own wit.

"Queer order out, to-night," added the blue-coat.

"What?"

"We are to watch for a man with handcuffs on him."

He who was a stranger to all there gave a slight start. He looked at the patrolman, and then at the entrance to the alley, as if speculating on the chances of flight.

"A man with handcuffs on?" repeated the watchman.

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Escaped prisoner."

"The dickens! Is he really wandering about the streets in such condition?"

"So we are told, though he may be housed before now. I am keeping a sharp lookout, and you can bet your last dollar I don't get my eyes on him without getting the pull on him."

"Who is he?"

"Corliss by name. Wounded a policeman some time ago, and the force only got sight of him to-night. Got the irons on him, and then he give them the laugh and chased himself out of view."

"You want to pull him."

"Can't do it unless I see him, but this much is sure—let me see him and he is my mutton."

The stranger of the party again gazed at the alley. He desired to run, but was well aware he could do so but slowly with the poor use he had of his hands, while an effort to go away slowly would attract attention to his peculiar way of holding those hands. He was about as ill at ease as he could be, and wished himself well out of the party.

The patrolman shifted his gaze directly to the stranger.

"You've added a new member," he remarked.

"Yes."

"Live around here, mister?"

This question was addressed to the stranger, and he had to say something. He swal-

lowed desperately, for his throat appeared to be full, and replied:

"A couple blocks off."

"What is your name?"

"Tierney."

"Common name around here. Drop around on my beat some time; I shall be glad to see you any time."

To prove his good will, the officer put out his hand to grasp that of Mr. "Tierney"—a step which made a cold chill pass through Tierney's frame. He had good reasons for not taking that hand.

"Excuse me," he returned, in a voice which trembled suspiciously, "but I have lost the action of my arms and can't shake hands."

"Palsy?"

"I can't say."

"I am somewhat of a doctor in the mesmeric way. Possibly I can suggest the exact cause of the trouble on examination. Let me see your arms."

Again he reached out, but the object of his solicitude was duly cautious. He kept his position and answered:

"Thank you for your interest, but I would not think of it. I am under treatment now, and can't meddle with the other doctor."

"Oh! all right."

The patrolman was annoyed by the cool way in which he was rebuffed, and he let the subject drop without any more talk. He rose to leave the yard.

"So-long, boys," he said, carelessly.

"Good-night, officer. Watch out for the man with handcuffs on his wrists, and nab him if he shows up."

"He don't come near my beat and get off clear, now you bet."

With a swing of his club to emphasize the assertion, the blue-coat marched off toward the street. Tierney drew a breath of relief, but it was only one drop in the bucket. He was still in trouble.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN OMINOUS ENCOUNTER.

TIERNEY sat in a hopeless attitude. The story of the man with handcuffs on his wrists was of deep interest to him, for he was none other than Henry Corliss, and the objectionable irons were still in place.

After all that had been said he knew he could not rely upon his present companions to remove them, and he became desirous of getting rid of them as soon as possible, but there was the danger to be feared if he went out on the street when a general alarm had been sent out for him, and all policemen were supposed to be on the watch for him.

Where was he to go, anyhow?

That was the question he asked himself, but he found no answer.

The night watchman suddenly rose.

"Boys," he remarked, "I shall have to ask you to adjourn, now. The hour is late, and this ain't a place where folks are allowed to loaf, you know. I shall be glad to see you all some other evening."

He looked at Henry as he spoke, as if to indicate that the invitation was for him, too, but the fugitive was conscious only of the fact that he must go out, whether he wished or not.

He rose with the rest, and was soon on the street. New York had never looked so ominous to him before as it did then, even if he had been acting the prowler for some days.

A general alarm! Then how could he escape notice?

Down the street he wandered—the street where every shadow seemed to threaten him. He was on the east side of the Bowery, and, as he did not dare to go back in that direction, he formed the plan of going to the East River and seeking some sort of seclusion there. What would come of it he did not know, but something must be done. He

was not a being of ethereal form, and he could not disappear mysteriously.

It was a long and painful walk. He had to keep his ironed hands under his coat, and he expected the fact would impress every person he met as suspicious, but he was far more successful than he dared to express, and his destination was reached without adventure.

He happened to strike a lonely place along the river, and there he sat down on the pier where there seemed to be no other sign of life.

He gazed at the stream with gloomy attention.

"One plunge and it would all be over!" he muttered.

He shivered at the thought, a moment later. Despairing as he was, he was not coward enough to take the life held as a sacred trust.

"Why do I keep up this battle?" he added, presently. "It is a losing game, and I may as well surrender myself at once as to continue the dog's life I am leading. Why not go to the police, now?"

A sound on the pier back of him. He heard it not.

"Oh!" he thought, "if I could only do something to help Petersen get the value of his bond! Surely, Jack Webber is a scoundrel who will never do him justice. Why was I fool enough to trust the certificate to him? Poor Hecla!"

Again the sound. This time he heard it. He turned his head.

He saw a man creeping toward him in stealthy fashion.

The fellow drew a knife and stood in a menacing attitude.

"Well, what do you want?" Corliss curtly asked.

"Your money," was the prompt reply.

Corliss laughed bitterly.

"What fools these mortals be! Man, I am without money—"

"I don't believe it!"

"All right; do as you please."

"Give up your money or I will kill you!"

The stranger, who was plainly of the tramp order, moved forward with a stealthy tread, his eyes fixed sharply on Henry, but the latter did not show the least fear.

"Go ahead with your plan. I don't care a rap. You may kill me as soon as you wish."

The stranger came to a full stop. He was now standing over his marked victim, the knife raised for the blow, but the coolness of the victim dazed him.

"Put up your hands," he requested.

"My friend, if you have any work to do, go about it. I shall not put up my hands, and you can have this scene all to yourself. Stab away; I don't care. Speed the knife!"

"Be you crazy?"

"No. I am a man in hard luck. You talk about money, but I am not only out of the article, but out of love with life. I don't care to fool with you—strike! I don't want my life; if you do, go ahead!"

The knife fell, but not with a vicious stroke. Instead, it dropped solely because the tramp was surprised into inactivity. He was not used to men who wanted to part from life in this way, and it was a vast surprise, indeed.

"I don't understand," he muttered.

"Don't try. Strike!"

The tramp shook his head.

"I don't see the why of this, at all," he confessed, "but I am not going to do anything of the kind. Has luck used you so bad that you don't care whether you live or not?"

"Not a rap!"

"And you are bu'sted?"

"All but about twenty cents. Kill me and then take it."

"Not I. I have seen something of ill-luck, myself, and know how to sympathize

with you. I reckon you are not averse to being put on your feet again—in other words, you would rise from your ashes if you could, eh?"

"Yes."

"Come with me."

"Where?"

"Come and see."

Corliss rose promptly. The invitation stirred up his flagging spirits, and the desire to get out of his dilemma returned. Possibly, after all, there might be hope for him in the future, if he could make this man useful. He would try it.

He was conducted away from the pier a trifle, and to an old building. It looked to be deserted, but his guide produced a key and opened the door. As he did so he chuckled and remarked:

"You would not take me to be a householder, but you see I am. It's because the owners of the property have shut the place up, and they think they have shut all others out. This is an error of judgment, for which they are not to be blamed."

With this cheerful verdict the leader conducted his charge to a room on the second floor. There he produced a light—a step by no means risky, since it was an "inside" room—and Corliss had opportunity to look around more fully.

Evidently the room had once been an attachment of a store, but it was wholly deserted, and only a bed of rags told that any human being had made use of it before.

"Here we are, perfectly safe," added the guide. "I have food; you shall eat. I have a bed; you shall sleep. I have clothes, but," with a glance at his wretched garments, "I do not think that you will want to wear them. Further than this, my name is Brooks."

The ragged man was very cheerful, his desire to do the robber act having all died away, and Corliss did not let the mood pass. He talked with his new acquaintance, trying to decide on one important point.

The thing that interested him most was, could he trust Brooks with the knowledge of the fact that he wore handcuffs?

Some one must help him out of his dilemma, and he finally concluded that he had found just the right person. Brooks was no lover of the law, as was very plain, so, unless his cupidity might lead him to betray the confidence, he was as safe as anybody, perhaps.

The subject was finally broached.

"You say you will help me, eh?"

"Yes."

"How far?"

"Try me!"

"Would you sell out a man to the police?"

"Never!"

"Are you sure?"

"Dead sure!"

"Then see here!"

Quickly Corliss brought his hands out from under his coat, and the irons were exposed. Silence followed, the tramp gazing at the strange sight in amazement. Clearly, it was something new in his experience, and he was a long while in finding his breath. Finally he turned his gaze upon Corliss's face.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" he exclaimed.

"You see now how I am situated."

"I do, and I love you like a brother, by the Old Nick! Those things are the badge of your honor with me, and you will find I am one of the boys who stand by a fellow. Betray you? Never, never!"

"Stick to your good intentions and you may be able to get rich out of it. The police would pay a small sum for your information if you went to betray me, but I will do far more for you."

"Say no more, for you are safe. But those things must come off."

"Immediately! Can you do it?"

"What have I to use? Something must be had, sure. But what? I can't twist them off, I fear, without breaking a few dozen bones in your wrists, so we must find something decent to do the job with."

"What?"

"I don't know, but I do know of a man who can tell in a jiffy. He has had such an experience that he is an adept, and it won't be long after I get his orders before I can yank them off and never hurt ye."

"I prefer to wrench them clear with something you may be able to find."

"It can't be done."

"I am not experienced in such things, but it seems to me it can."

"No."

"I will risk the pain."

"Yes, but it's impossible."

Corliss was not convinced or satisfied, but, as his companion seemed to be sincere and interested, he turned to the alternative.

"Is it safe to trust the man you mention?"

"Yes."

"And you think he can suggest a way?"

"I reckon he kin furnish a key that'll unlock them things as well as the one that locked them."

"Then go to him. Say to him that you want to do this, but do not be too confidential. Kindly omit particulars."

"I don't know particulars, myself."

"You shall know all when I can tell you," evasively replied Henry.

"All right. This is the first time I ever found a feller being wandering around the streets with handcuffs on his wrists, but I'll curb my curiosity and see you out of it, by thunder!"

"Good! Do this and you shall not suffer for it. I'll pay you well as soon as I can."

"That can be arranged all right, I reckon. Now, you just stay here and I will have the key if it can be had. Don't carry the light into the next rooms, for you will have the police in here. This is supposed to be a deserted building."

"I'll be careful."

"And don't get discouraged if I am not back at once. I want just the man I have named, and it won't be prudent to get any other."

"I agree with you."

"Well, I'm off. So-long!"

Brooks went out, and Corliss was left alone. It was a good deal of a relief to him to see a little hope, but he would not feel easy until it had materialized.

Brooks did not seem to be so poor, financially, as he claimed to be. He took a car and did some riding in an easterly direction. When he came to a stop it was at a house near the Bowery. The hour had grown so late that no one was astir, there, but he rung the door-bell and soon gained attention.

Being admitted he was shortly after in the room of a man who rose to receive him.

"Well, what is it?" asked the latter.

"Cap, I've come on a queer business, but there's a certain fellow in trouble, and I think if we help him out we may add a valuable member to the band. I want you to see him."

Singular turn of fate! The person whom he had addressed as "Cap" was none other than Jack Webber. And it was to Jack Webber he had come to secure aid for Corliss. Truly, Corliss had cause to dread the return!

CHAPTER XV.

A GENERAL SURPRISE.

THE following day Detective Bob was pursuing his way toward the East River. He paused, consulted a note he carried and then murmured:

"Must be near here, unless Molly has made a mistake in her geography. Mebbe et's that pier."

He walked out on the structure mentioned.

Nothing was to be seen there except a man who was sunning himself on a box.

"Stranger," asked Robert, "kin you tell me where one Silas Spruce has a coal an' wood office, nigh here?"

"Down there," was the brief reply.

"In the water?"

"Next pier."

"Oh! I see, an' much obleeged ter you. So-long!"

Robert went his way, and on the next pier he found the coal and wood office. He found more. Molly was there, and her face brightened at sight of him. She was sitting on a box near the office, and, before his arrival, had been attentively watching for something or other.

Robert hastened to secure a seat beside her.

"Great place, this," he remarked. "What is that chap doin' over yender? Call the stuff he is handlin' coal an' wood?"

"There's two businesses here," Molly replied. "Fruit is landed here by other parties, an' you can see that they are handlin' that."

"So I do, my angel. Well, you sent for me—"

"Robert, Henry Corliss has been seen around here."

"The dickens he has!"

"Yes, my uncle saw him."

"When?"

"Late last night."

"Aha!"

The revelation suddenly interested Robert. If it was true, the fugitive had been there after his escape from the Bowery lodging-house, and there was a clue in the direction he had taken.

"Tell me all about et," he requested.

"Uncle was down here late at night, and as he was going away he saw two men leave the pier above. One looked like a rough, but he says the other was Henry Corliss. He had seen him before all this trouble began, for he visits the house where the Petersens live. He knew of Henry's trouble, and that I was interested, but his wits did not work quick enough to act then. Afterward, when he thought it over, he just sent fer me."

"Wal, where is Henry, now?"

"I don't know, an' I'm jest worried ter death over it. He will be took sure."

Molly's very serious expression proved that she was worried, but Robert hid his own feelings in order to encourage her.

"Now, you be calm," he advised. "This will all come out right. Ef he's been around here we kin find him—mebbe!"

Consoler though he was, the Rattler could not help adding the last word. Far better than Molly he realized how desperate was the situation of their friend.

"Where shall we look?" asked Molly, practically.

"Ain't you no idee?"

"No; though I was stayin' around nere an' keepin' up the watch until you come. I am all broke up over et!"

"Molly," replied the Rattler, "our friend ain't been arrested fer that shootin' scrape yet, an' he won't be ef we kin prevent it."

"But the police are chasin' him everywhere."

"Police!" retorted Robert, with a smile; "what be they? Ain't you and I, Molly, their match?"

"Do be serious. Don't laugh!"

"Ef I laugh I kin do more," replied the Rattler. "I'm goin' ter save Henry from his enemies, an' don't you forget et!"

Suddenly growing more earnest, the speaker added:

"We can't trail Henry like as ef he was on the prairie, but we kin do our pootiest as et is. But where is the clue? Mebbe he jest come here an' jumped inter the water."

"Oh!" cried Molly, startled at the thought.

"But I don't think et," resumed the Rat-

tlar, hastily. "No; he would not be so foolish. He will show up all right, or we shall get clipped of our reputations as detectives. Now, I reckon he made friends with that feller he was with, an' he must be around here, now. Result, I'll look fer him."

"Do it, Robert, and I'll stay here an' watch ter see ef he comes back near here."

The plan was well laid, but it did not satisfy Robert. Well did he understand how serious a matter it was for a man to be roaming the streets of New York under the circumstances with which Henry Corliss had to deal. If he could be found and conducted to some refuge it would save him for the time, but if he could not be found—where, then, did hope lie?

The Rattler made a thorough search of the vicinity, but not a clue did he get to the missing man. All the while he was under the weight of fear that Corliss had tired of the unequal fight and sought an end to it in the dark embrace of the river, and it was discouraging, to say the least.

Early in the afternoon Bob took a trip over toward the Bowery to see if there was any news in that quarter, but there was nothing. The only result was that Cal Demorest asked permission to join Robert in the search near the East River, and was allowed to do so.

It was nearing the time of nightfall, and the two allies were roaming about when Molly suddenly appeared. Her face was full of excitement.

"I've seen him!" she panted.

"Who?" asked Robert.

"Henry!"

"Hi! that so? Where?"

"He's in an old buildin near the pier."

"Wal, that's rich. How do ye know?"

"He come ter the winder an' I see him."

"Did ye speak?"

"No, fer he went out o' sight right away."

"Tell us all about et."

"I happened ter be lookin' up toward the winder, an' I see him look out. He didn't stay there long, but seemed afraid o' bein' seen by others, so he kinder dodged back an' that was the last of it. He's in that buildin', though."

"Be you sure, Molly?"

"Why, certain, I be."

"Then in I go."

"Et looks like et was a deserted buildin'."

"So much the better. Probably et's a place he spotted an' crawled inter. Anyhow, in I go, an' ef he's ter be had, I'll have him."

The Rattler had learned to place confidence in Molly, and he no longer doubted that she really had seen Corliss. If it had not been directly in line with what had been learned from the dealer in wood and coal he might have been more reluctant to accept all so quickly, but, as it was, he took the story as proven.

The next thing was to get into the house. He looked it over and saw it would be no easy task; but he was not to be discouraged. After some thought he planned it all, and then only waited for the arrival of full darkness.

This came, and he made the venture. It meant a good deal of climbing along dangerous ways, but he was successful, and finally stood in the building.

"Black as Egypt!" he muttered, looking ahead. "Ef I had a light with me I should need a second one ter find the first b'ginner!"

Smiling at his own conceit he moved along by sense of feeling. It was not difficult, for the way was firm and safe, and he went from one room to another slowly, but without result for some time.

He was thus occupied, when he suddenly stopped short.

"Somebody stirrin'! Who?"

There were footsteps below, and he stood still and waited. He heard men ascend the stairs. They came close to him.

"If he ain't dead yet, we'll soon find him," remarked one.

"No danger of that with the supply of food I left him."

The last speaker opened a door, but there was no light beyond.

"Hallo!" he added. "Anybody here?"

There was no reply.

"Speak up if you are here. I am Brooks."

Some one stirred in the room.

"I am here."

"Good! But where is your lamp?"

"The oil has wholly burned out."

"I'll get some more soon, but, before I do so, let us talk a little. I have brought the man I told you about. I am very sorry there has been so much delay, but it was simply impossible for us to get here sooner. Now, you shall soon be relieved of those handcuffs."

All this the Rattler heard, but the last words were not necessary to give him the desired light. He had already recognized Henry Corliss's voice, and he knew he had moved on a step. He felt like rushing forward, but the fact that he did not know who these latest comers were kept him back.

Prudence would do no harm then.

Brooks and the second man who had come with him entered the room fully, and the latter became busy at one side. Realizing that he was preparing the light, every one waited patiently. He soon completed his task and struck a match.

"Now we will have a social talk," he remarked, pleasantly.

He applied the blaze to the wick. The light flamed up fully, and each person had view of the others.

Robert directed his gaze eagerly to Henry Corliss, and was rewarded by the sight of him which had so long been desired. Henry looked pale and careworn, but not so much the worse for his experience as was to be expected. The Rattler drew a sigh of relief, but a sudden change of Corliss's own expression attracted his attention.

Henry was looking at one of the newcomers—Brooks's companion—with startled attention. Quickly Robert changed his own regard, and what he saw dumfounded him.

The third man was Jack Webber!

"Thunder!" gasped the Rattler.

If he was surprised, Jack and Henry were not less so, and they gazed in utter silence for several moments. If there was surprise on the one side, there was more on the other—Corliss was stunned by the new misfortune.

Suddenly Jack broke into a laugh.

"By my life!" he cried, "this is rich!"

"Webber!" murmured Corliss, half-unconsciously.

"Yes, it's I, old boy, and I should say this is *you*! Why, I never heard of a stranger thing! When I was summoned here, I had not the slightest idea that I was to see an old friend."

"Friend!" echoed Henry, bitterly.

"Am I not?"

"Jack Webber, you are a scoundrel!" cried Corliss, hotly. "All this trouble is due to you—but for you there would be no trouble at all. You have been my ruin. Listen!"

"I am of a family as honorable as any in this city, but, unfortunately, one not blessed with riches. My father is an honorable man, but a poor man. I got together a little money and went into the firm of Morris & Finnerty. They now charge me with fraud. I tell you I have done none, and if I was at liberty I could prove it."

"Unfortunately, affairs growing out of Olaf Petersen's case have made me an exile and a fugitive."

"I should say so. Aha! so you're the man who is wandering around with handcuffs on his wrists!"

"All your work!"

"How so?"

"Where is the certificate you stole from Petersen, knave?"

Jack had been insolently good-natured, but the harsh words caused him to lose his temper. He whipped a folded paper out of his pocket.

"Here!" he cried. "Here is the certificate. Do you want it? If you do, do you know of any way of getting it?"

"Man, I confided that to you—fool that I was!—under the belief that you would cash it and help Petersen out of his troubles. Now, you have stolen it!"

"Call it what you will, I have it and shall keep it. I have not yet negotiated it, and it's the same as ever. But I'll keep it—Ha! what in perdition!"

The paper had been suddenly and violently wrested from his hand.

CHAPTER XVI.

SQUARING THE ACCOUNT.

JACK WEBBER wheeled with the fierce exclamation on his lips.

It was Robert who had thus deprived him of the paper. It was a step the Rattler would not have taken if he had been allowed time to think clearly, but, when he saw the precious document thus defiantly flaunted before him, he could not resist the temptation. He had made a quick movement and secured it, regardless of consequences.

And there he now stood, facing the sport.

Jack's face was a panorama as he took in one feature after another of the situation, but it took only a short time to do it.

"Brooks," he cried, "who is this kid?"

"Blowed if I know!"

"Is he wholly unknown to you?"

"Yes, he must be a spy."

"And a friend of Corliss. I'll see to this!"

He made a dive for Robert, but the latter was not to be caught so easily. He realized that he had to face the situation as it was, and he ceased to think of his rashness and set out to save himself.

Agilely he evaded Jack, and as he made the movement a key dropped from the paper he held and went rattling to the floor. It was that which had been brought in the hope that it would unlock the handcuffs.

If Robert had known this he would not have placed much faith in the idea that it would be of use to him. He did not know it, so he jumped to the conclusion that it was the self-same key that should unlock the irons.

A new hope came to him.

Was it not possible to use the key and liberate Henry before anything could be done to prevent it?

Quickly he proceeded to act on the thought. He knew how to use a regular key in such a case, and he sprung to Corliss's side like a flash.

"Hold up yer dukes!" he cried, eagerly.

Henry did not comprehend fully, but there was no need that he should. Robert hastened to introduce the implement of hope, and luck was with him marvelously. The first turn freed the hands of the fugitive; the irons fell away and he was clear of all impediments.

Lucky, indeed, had the Rattler been; the key had fitted as well as if intended for that especial pair of irons, and no delay had been caused by imperfect movements on the part of the rescuer.

Bob laughed gleefully.

"The game is ours!" he cried.

Jack Webber rallied. He had been too slow to prevent all this, but he was now on the alert. He forgot that Henry was a fugitive from officers of law—remembering only that there was danger of his own treachery in regard to the bond being laid

bare he determined to stop the work, secure the lost bond, and prevent Henry and his ally from leaving the room.

"Guard the door!" he shouted to Brooks.

"Don't let them out."

Brooks hastened to the desired place.

Corliss was on his feet, eager to act, but he suddenly found a revolver leveled upon him.

"Stand where you are, or die!" added Jack, harshly.

"What would you do?" asked Henry, uneasily.

"Shoot you, if necessary."

"Why should you?"

"I am not going to be the victim here. If anybody goes down it will not be me."

"Have I offered to touch you?"

"No."

"Then why should you shoot me?"

"I am going to have that bond back."

"So is your grandfather!"

This chipper remark came from Robert, the Rattler. He had been staggered by sight of the revolver, at first, but all his coolness soon returned. He faced the sport resolutely.

"Ef you look at the bill o' fare," he added, cheerfully, "you will see et is *me* that has got this dockymunt. Yes, b'ginger! an' I'm goin' ter keep et, too."

The revolver was turned upon the bold boy.

"Come here!"

Jack spoke the words in a clear, determined voice, and Robert changed color a trifle.

"Eh?"

"Come here!"

"What fer?"

"Come and give me that paper!"

"Not much, I won't!"

"Then I'll shoot you. I am not going to do any monkey business at this stage of the game. I have played it too far to give up now. I'm going to have that paper, and you shall bring it to me. Come here!"

Robert moved uneasily. He did not like the looks of the revolver, and his opinion of Jack was that he would just as soon use the weapon as not. It was an ugly situation, and it was no discredit to the Rattler that he was worried.

"This paper ain't yours."

"That is none of your business. Bring it here."

"You will have to obey," advised Harry, with a sigh.

"Shall I?"

"Yes."

"Wal, I s'pose the easiest way is the best. Et goes ag'in the grain like thunder, I do declare, but you ought to be boss here. Wal, so be et."

Robert moved toward Jack. The boy looked meek and down-hearted, but those who thought he was quelled were wide of the mark. Jack was one of them. Not dreaming that a mere boy would have the temerity to resist, he lowered the muzzle of his revolver and put out his hand for the certificate.

It was the chance for which the Rattler was wishing, and he was not slow to improve it. Submission was far from his mind, and, as he could see but one way of fighting to advantage, he proceeded to put into execution.

He was within a few feet of Jack when he suddenly lowered his head and made a dive forward like a particularly festive goat. That head, firmly poised, struck Mr. Jack Webber square in the stomach, and with a grunt he keeled over and fell flat on the floor.

One more dive Robert made, and the dropped revolver was in his grasp.

"Rally, Henry!" he called, excitedly. "This is our innin', an' we want ter score. Git at them!"

Corliss was wholly taken by surprise on

seeing this zealous resistance. Whether he would have proved equal to the demands made upon him cannot be known. Brooks was the first to regain his nerve. He, too, drew a revolver.

"If this is the way things are going, I am in it!" he declared.

The revolver was pointed toward Robert and the hammer flew back with a click. It seemed to be his purpose to fire, but another surprise came.

His hand was suddenly seized and the weapon turned upward.

"Stop it!" was the stern command.

And into the room pressed several men with Cal Demorest and Molly at their heels.

"Anybody who tries to do a lawless act here will fare hard!" added the previous speaker, sharply.

But it was not at him that Henry Corliss looked. Somewhat back was a quiet, pale-faced man, and Henry murmured:

"My father!"

The elder man hastened forward and would have taken his son to his arms, but Henry retreated.

"Not until you know all," he remonstrated.

"I know all, now—far more than you do. Henry, why did you not come to me in your trouble?"

"I was ashamed."

"Of what?"

The younger Corliss hesitated, and then whispered:

"It was my misfortune to wound a policeman—"

"I know of that, and I know more, I say. Men call me impractical, because I am a student, but I have been hard at work for you, and have done as well as a practical man could. I have compelled Morris & Finnerty to overhaul their books, and they admit there is no charge against you. More, the policeman you mention now admits that the shooting was an accident, and, through my influence with his captain, he has promised to let it pass, as he now knows the excitement you labored under."

"Am I, indeed, free from that curse?"

"Wholly free. As for yonder man," and he pointed to Jack Webber, "he has been proven the leader of a gang of river thieves, and is now to be arrested. Officer, do your duty."

One of the strangers advanced.

Jack was far from being subdued, mentally, but he saw how useless resistance would be, and when he learned he had a detective opposed to him he yielded sullenly.

Cal pressed forward and whispered to Detective Bob.

"They trailed Jack here, an' me an' Molly jest ketchin' on an' come in here with them."

"Bully fer you, my frien'! We seem ter hev the whip-row, an', by ginger! the coveted bond is in my grip. Whoop! this is our day, an' the p'izen snakes are at last at the end o' their run. Molly, give us yer fin. The Big Four o' the Bowery has got the bulge onter the foe, an' we kin sing songs o' bliss an' dance a hornpipe on the fallen enemy. Glory ter us folks! but ain't this a dead cinch!"

So it ended. Olaf Petersen had his bond back, and worthy people interested themselves in his behalf and saw that he had a business situation where he could make money as fast as he could reasonably desire. Day had dawned for him and Hecla.

Jack Webber, Con Martin, Brooks, Pete and the rest of the river thieves were tried, convicted and sent to Sing Sing.

Henry Corliss withdrew from the firm of Morris & Finnerty, but found another good position. From that day he was more careful of his company, and men like Jack were avoided.

There was no rich man to reward Robert, Cal and Molly with a big sum of money, but they were remembered as well as they could expect, and that was satisfactory.

Each of the young trio is prosperous today.

Only a short time ago they were present at a notable event, it being the marriage of Hecla and Henry.

"Biggest show I ever attended!" quoth the Rattler, humorously. "The bride and her best feller looked right cute, but, Cal, an' Molly, did they beat us out in that line? Wal, yer uncle guesses not! An' my beloved brethren, where would they be now but fer the Big Four o' the Bowery?"

THE END.

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